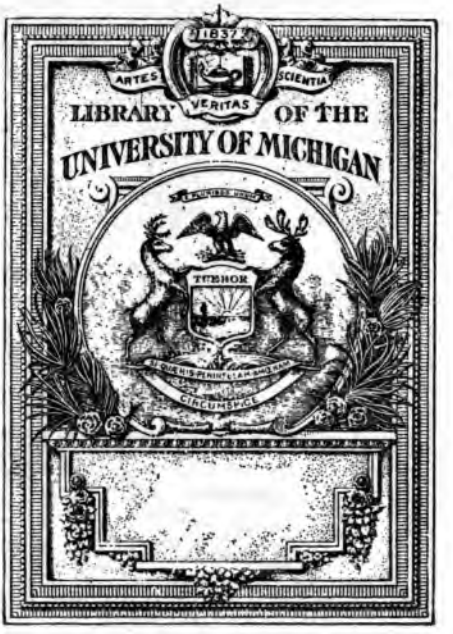
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CONCERNING THE THEATRE
AND DEMOCRACY IN
AMERICA

BY

PERCY MACKAYE

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1909

Set up and electrotyped. Published April, 1909.

Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing Co. — Berwick & Smith Co.
Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

To

THE DEAR AND HONORED MEMORY

OF MY FATHER

STEELE MACKAYE

RENASCENT SPIRIT, RESOURCEFUL PIONEER

UNDAUNTED VINDICATOR OF THE THEATRE IN AMERICA

DURING TWENTY YEARS

AS DRAMATIST, ACTOR, DIRECTOR, ORGANIZER

AND INVENTOR

An Excerpt from "Justice and Liberty"

By G. Lowes Dickinson

A Banker and a Professor are Conversing

The Banker: No reasonable man imagines that there may not be changes in human nature whereby things may become possible that are not possible now. Only, we say, first change your human nature before you begin meddling with institutions.

The Professor: That again sounds so reasonable, yet really, in practice, is so obstructive. *For if it be true that institutions depend on human nature, it is also true that human nature depends on them, and on our ideas about them.* And if you treat institutions as something sacrosanct, if you rule out all criticism of them, and all experimenting with them, you are hindering precisely the change in human nature which you say you want, by suppressing that insurrection of the spirit which alone can bring it about. . . . *What really stirs men is a demonstration that the order under which they live is neither reasonable nor just. They may then come to find it so intolerable that they can no longer rest in it.* And then, and then only, you have the condition of your change in human nature. . . .

The first condition of acquiring knowledge is to desire it.

NOTE

Of the following contents, *The Playhouse and the Play* and *The Drama of Democracy* (the latter published in *The Columbia University Quarterly*, June, 1908) are addresses delivered by the author, in 1907–1908, at the universities of Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Chicago, Michigan, and California, The Twentieth Century Club and The Book and Play Club, Chicago, The MacDowell Association and The League for Political Education, New York, and elsewhere; *The Dramatist as Citizen* is an address delivered in February, 1909, before Harvard, Yale, Columbia, and Brown Universities, The League for Political Education, New York, and elsewhere; *Self-Expression and the American Drama* is reprinted, by permission, from *The North American Review* for September, 1908; *Art and Democracy* is an address given before The Society for Ethical Culture, New York, on Lincoln's Birthday, 1908.

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A DOZEN PROMPT NOTES

A DOZEN PROMPT NOTES

I

"NEVER before in the history of the American theatre has the future of our native drama been so splendid and secure in promise as to-day. In this undoubted fact we may well take joy and courage; *yet we need not be blind to the true causes of the fact.* The true causes for the unique promise and the encouraging achievement of the drama to-day arise not from any conducive qualifications of the existing theatrical system as a private speculative business, but from that great reawakening of our national consciousness which everywhere to-day is increasingly alive to deeper significances in our life and institutions."

Page 27.

II

"It is absurd to demand that a business man shall ruin his private business. It is

not absurd, however, to demand that a private business, whose legitimate function is that of a public art, shall be revolutionized to perform that function properly by ceasing to be a business."

Page 69.

III

"An effectual business needs no subsidy; an effectual art cannot live without it."

Page 207.

IV

"The status of the playhouse in society is as vital as the status of the university in society. The dignity and efficiency of the one demand the same safeguarding against inward deterioration as the dignity and efficiency of the other. The functions of both are educative. The safeguard of each is endowment."

Page 79.

V

"True democracy is vitally concerned with beauty, and true art is vitally concerned with citizenship."

Page 190.

VI

"To hold commercial managers primarily responsible for the evils of the playhouse is unreasonable. The managers do not primarily shape their own policies. The basic nature of the existing theatre as an institution—its nature as a private speculative business—is the great motivating cause which logically produces the policies of the managers. For tolerating that unworthy institutional basis of the theatre, the public is responsible."

Page 69.

VII

"Distinct from Segregated Drama (a fine art for the few) and Vaudeville (a heterogeneous entertainment for the many), exists, potential, a third ideal: the ideal of the Drama of Democracy—the drama as *a fine art for the many*."

Page 103.

VIII

"The highest potentiality of the drama can never be realized until the theatre—the drama's communal instrument—shall be dedicated to public, not private, ends."

Page 137.

IX

"Reformation of the playhouse is not a matter of reforming individuals, but of reforming conditions."

Page 85.

X

"The efficient regulation of its functions to the ends of greatest public service is the concern of the leaders of the American people — our eminent educators, our civic societies, our powerful and altruistic citizens."

Page 85.

XI

"A house of private speculation is not adapted to be a house of public education."

Page 128.

XII

"Nevertheless, night after night, year after year, our theatres *are* educating our people by the millions and tens of millions. The question is: Shall the theatre educate those millions *right* or *wrong*?"

Page 84.

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

THE vital problems which confront the drama in America to-day are not primarily questions of dramatic art; they are questions which concern the opportunities for dramatic art properly to exist and to mature. Primarily, therefore, they are not æsthetic questions; they are civic questions. They are questions which concern a potential dramatic art, and the barriers which prevent or retard its existence. They are questions which concern, on the part of dramatic artists, liberation; on the part of the public, enlightenment.

To obtain these objects, a thoroughgoing knowledge and discussion of all important issues of the drama are necessary first steps toward their wise solution. Much discussion and some knowledge of these issues have of late been publicly indulged in and acquired, with remarkably encouraging results; and it is

the aim of this volume hopefully to do its slight part in urging still wider discussion, still more searching knowledge, of these matters.

Of the five essays here included, the first concerns itself with the conditioning influences of the theatre upon the drama; the second, with a possible goal for our native drama; the third, with the civic status of the dramatist's profession; the fourth, with the need of leadership; the fifth, with art as public service.

Whatever opinions are expressed in these pages are my sincere beliefs at this time. It does not follow, however, that they are unalterable beliefs. I shall hope to profit by criticism and possible refutation of their tenets by minds wiser than my own; and I set them forth here solely for the sake of stimulating inquiry and knowledge in the great and vital subject which they inadequately treat.

For centuries of Anglo-Saxon tradition, the theatre has held an unclassified place in the structure of society. Acknowledged always as a powerful influence upon the lives of men,

it has never been systematically utilized as such by the civic leaders of men. As a national force, it has never been correlated with the other great forces of citizenship, of law, of industry, of statecraft, of patriotism. Nevertheless the theatre, in its proper function, is peculiarly fitted for such association.

Why, then, have the nations hitherto failed so to organize the theatre as to utilize it properly as a national force?

Historically, they have not always failed to do so.

Three distinctive traditions of the theatre come down to us from Europe: the Anglo-Saxon, the Continental, the Greek.

According to Anglo-Saxon tradition, the theatre — being concerned with an art — was long ago relegated, by the Anglo-Saxon indifference or contempt for all the arts except that of pure literature, to the twilight realm of Bohemia. This has been a lasting result of the Puritan revolution in England. Thus in English-speaking nations the art of the theatre has never been officially recognized by society,

or the state, as a force of civilization. This Anglo-Saxon attitude, though modified in recent years by Continental influences, still obtains; and we in America directly inherit the Anglo-Saxon tradition of the theatre, and labor under its disadvantages.

The most poignant of these disadvantages — and the one which has been most disastrous in its results both upon the theatre's own self-respect and upon the character of Anglo-Saxon communities — has been the necessity, forced upon it by society, for the theatre to *indulge* the public taste instead of to *guide* it.

Relegated to Bohemianism, it has had to lead a shifty livelihood by using its humanistic powers for the petty ends of commercial existence. Not even the lofty stature of a Shakspere has been able to impress the Anglo-Saxon with the theatre's proper function in the nation. So far from perceiving in Shakspere a convincing exemplification of the potential dignity of the theatre, Englishmen have for centuries conveniently classified their supreme dramatist as a "bard," consistently

extolling his poetic dignity whilst they have degraded the civic status of his art.

According to Continental traditions, on the other hand, the theatre — being concerned with an art — has held a position of strong influence and high regard in society, but of less influence in the state proper. This has been a lasting result of its endowment, protection, and encouragement by the kings, courts, and principalities of Europe. This, too, has been in accord with the special genius of the Continental civilization, where artists have long been leaders in social taste but not in civic strategy.

Thus the theatre has exerted, for centuries in France, and for a century or more in Germany, an extraordinary influence upon manners and philosophy, dealing authentically with living problems, social and intellectual. But in the larger national issues of politics, national industry, and statecraft, it has exerted comparatively little or no real influence.

According, however, to Greek tradition the theatre — being concerned with an art —

held a position of double vantage, due to the special genius of that people — a people whose artists were also soldiers and statesmen. The theatre in Athens exerted a guiding influence both upon society and the state, and thereby rose to the full dignity of its proper status and function.

Of these traditions, the Anglo-Saxon expresses a Bohemian ideal; the Continental, a social ideal; the Greek, a civic ideal.

What bearing, then, to-day have these three distinctive traditions of the theatre upon the destiny of the drama in America?

With regard to all art, America stands in an unique position of inheritance. We are, first, the direct heirs of Anglo-Saxon tradition, and this heritage is chiefly responsible for the unworthy status of dramatic art in our country.

But more than this, we are increasingly the heirs of Continental tradition, and this heritage is chiefly responsible for the encouraging signs to-day of an important uplift in the status of dramatic art in America.

The appearance of a book like Archer and Barker's "Scheme and Estimates for a National Theatre" [1] is one of these auspicious signs. In that volume — a work of impressive industry and altruism — is epitomized the age-long experience of the best Continental traditions in the theatre, and that experience is rendered available, with specific directness, to whomsoever shall think wise to carry on those traditions in America.

Those traditions it is the announced policy of the New Theatre, at New York, to foster in a carefully equipped playhouse, partially subsidized — though not yet fully endowed — by private ownership. This theatre, lately dedicated, will open its first season next autumn, presenting modern and classic plays in repertoire. Greatly desirable as will be its worthy success in helping to counteract Anglo-Saxon tradition and to confer stability and dignity upon dramatic art, the scope of the New Theatre, being devoted to establishing the methods and aims of Continental tradi-

[1] New York, Duffield and Company, 1908.

tion in the metropolis, necessarily cannot include certain radical objects and national opportunities of the drama, as these freshly unfold themselves to the thoughtful observer of our democracy.

Some of these radical objects are already being pursued with zeal by an enterprise of auspicious promise in New York. The Educational Theatre for Children and Young People, organized with Mr. Samuel Clemens ("Mark Twain") as president of its Board of Directors, is utilizing the elemental power of dramatic impulse in young people for the refinement of their imaginations and the upbuilding of character. Dedicated to non-commercial ends, under the immediate directorship of its initiator, Miss Alice Minnie Herts, the Educational Theatre is helping to create the first requisite of an enlightened theatre — an enlightened audience.

Speaking of the deep-seated instinct utilized by this institution, President Eliot has lately said: —

"Here is this tremendous power over chil-

dren and over fathers and mothers that ought to be utilized for their good. It is true that the dramatic instinct is very general, and it can be used to put into the hearts and minds of children and adults all sorts of noble and influential thoughts, and that is the use that ought to be made of it. . . . So I say that this power, developed in a very striking manner by Miss Herts in the Educational Theatre, is one that ought to be at least in every school in this country, and moreover I believe that it is going to be."

In New York, also, under the idealistic direction of Mr. Charles Sprague Smith, the People's Institute has ministered to the higher uses of the drama in practical work, which has long been well known.

In such humanistic efforts of organized desire, we are (thirdly) the heirs — not from overseas, but from within us — of a new spirit of democracy; and this heritage, from the resurrecting vernal forces of mankind, is imbuing our republic with the promise of a new Hellenism; with the promise of a nation where

our artists, too, shall be soldiers and statesmen; with a sense of the correlation of all vital human concerns in the pursuit of a world-happiness; with the desire, in brief, of a vaster perfection.

By the glow of this new spirit of democracy our theatre, too, is being transfigured. In the light of that larger destiny which awaits it in the nation, the chaotic Bohemian ideal of Anglo-Saxon tradition stands like a relique of the dark ages. Its meagre picturesqueness has long since ceased to be an excuse for its unwholesome survival. It must not only be repudiated, it must be pulled down, and give space to the lovelier grandeur of the Theatre of Democracy.

Moreover, the Continental tradition — though it may serve always a very valuable purpose, as conservator of the best in past achievement, and provide a precious museum for the student and the connoisseur — must prove, I believe, inadequate to fulfil the theatre's national function in America.

In brief, a more inclusive ideal must be

sought for the larger promise which America and the twentieth century hold out to the theatre, — an ideal which shall establish the art of the dramatist as a permanent civic agency in the structure of American communities; an agency of guidance and liberation to the people. That ideal is found, I believe, — with nearest approximation, — in the ideal of the Greek tradition of the theatre: an ideal which tends to reconcile the traditions of art and democracy.

The space of this preface does not permit of enlarging specifically upon the developments of this ideal. Nor, indeed, have I done so in this volume, save as I have merely suggested them in the chapters, "The Drama of Democracy" and "The Dramatist as Citizen." In a second volume I purpose to do so. But, in passing, I may properly allude to what appears to be a popular fallacy concerning this topic. It is frequently asserted that the ideals of art and of democracy are irreconcilable; that art differentiates and uplifts, whereas democracy assimilates and levels. To this I venture the

opinion that, in such an assertion, the ideals of democracy and of commercialism are confused. *Commercialism always levels; true democracy never.* And true democracy is reasserting itself to-day as never before.

The tendencies of art are idealistic; but so are the tendencies of our renascent republic. In the arts as in the industries our people are coming to demand *excellence;* that is, to demand something over and above an average quality known to themselves. They are coming to demand the highest quality known to the producer. For giving them that highest quality they put their faith in the producer, and they will exact that excellence in the product. Thus, in accordance with the ideal of true democracy, the citizen, or the artist, is required to dedicate to the people whatever he believes best in himself—*not merely what the people may suppose to be best.*

More and more, in accordance with that ideal, our people is coming to demand of its leaders that they shall *not* pay heed to its

whimsical demands, however strenuously urged, but to the demands of the nature of the work in hand. In short, they are coming to demand that their leaders shall be *experts*, who shall behave as experts, for the sake of the public who relies on them in that capacity. In the arts, these experts are called Artists; in the state, Representatives.

Now, in view of this ideal of art and democracy, what criticism and reconstruction are pertinent to our American drama?

To build foundations, ground must first be cleared, and the greater the structure to be raised, the deeper must the bulwarks be fixed in the solid rock of permanence. If we have in mind the revolution of a theatrical season or decade in a particular city, our reformation may be based, with fair confidence, in the courage, wisdom, and ideality of individual leaders. But if we have in mind the upbuilding of a dramatic era, whose living traditions shall stand for centuries, ennobling a nation, we must base our designs in stuff more perennial; we must base them in *reformative*

conditions, — conditions which shall *perennially tend to produce such individual leaders.*

This book is concerned with conditions — not with persons; with questions which concern right and wrong conditions of dramatic art, irrespective of particular individuals.

It goes without saying that every art exists by reason of the work of artists; but it should also go without saying that *artists, like other phenomena, exist by reason of conditions conducive to their being.*

The wise harvester does not sow in stubble: first, he removes the stubble. In calculating his wheat crop, he is not satisfied with reflecting that some sporadic wheat ears will probably flourish *in spite* of the stubble. On the contrary, *he cultivates his ground solely for the crop he desires to harvest.* In farming, at least, that procedure is considered common sense. In dramatic art —

The time would seem to have arrived to ask ourselves, as citizens: *What theatrical crop is most desirable to harvest for the American people? And how shall it be cultivated?*

The writer does not profess to answer these questions dogmatically. He believes, however, that it is of unimagined consequence that the leaders of our people should seek adequate answers for themselves.

The present book seeks to help clear the ground for the upbuilding — not in one city only but in all our greater American communities — of a permanently endowed theatrical institution, dedicated solely to dramatic art as a civic agency in the democracy: a civic theatre for the people.

Another volume, which the author proposes to publish later, will seek to outline the structural features, the inward and outward safeguardings, the proper balance of the controlling forces, the social ramifications and influences of such an institution, together with the practical steps necessary for its establishment. The attributes of this imagined theatre will be adapted to the ideals suggested in the essay "The Drama of Democracy," and in several fundamental respects will differ from ideals of the theatre as now founded either in Anglo-Saxon or in Continental tradition.

To one devoted to the interests both of our drama and of our country, it becomes increasingly clear that if the interests of both are to be reconciled, our theatrical leaders may no longer ignore their responsibilities as citizens; our leading citizens may no longer ignore the potentialities of the theatre as a civic institution.

The contents of this volume have been gathered together because of the gratifying reception already accorded to those portions which I have delivered as addresses before several of our universities. As a result of that pleasant privilege, I discovered—what, I believe, is not yet realized by the public, nor perhaps by the universities themselves — that those highest schools of our country are already the seats of a modest but vital dramatic renascence, critical and creative.

In at least four of our largest universities, I met with groups of young men, banded together by a common ardor and a special capacity for the purpose of studying and mastering the technique of plays. The spirit which *imbued* these young men appeared not to be

that of archaic research or dilettantism, of school régime or social fad. On the contrary, they exhibited that fine fellowship of purpose and determination of pursuit, which one associates with the studios of young sculptors and painters — art students, happy in their dead earnestness. Their aims were specific, contemporaneous, and prophetic of a new order. It is a fresh phenomenon and a heartening one. It is significant also that, in at least two cases, these university men have grouped themselves under a critical master of large special knowledge and enthusiasm. Professor George Pierce Baker, of Harvard, and Professor William Lyon Phelps, of Yale, are impressing with their trained insight generations which promise soon to leaven the American public with a new reverence for the drama, based upon criteria more clear, accomplishments more excellent than in the past.

Now, in the light of the high aims and aspirations of these young men,— and of other American young men and women in all paths of life, who look gladly to the drama as their

goal of expression, — where shall these seek opportunity for embodying their aspirations efficiently? *By what standards of the theatre shall they set their actual work,* not simply for individual livelihood but for public service? How shall they focus their efforts and their ideals so as to bring their best gifts to realization and, by patient collaboration toward a common aim, give visible and splendid sign of the renascence which already lives and throbs to be born?

Are these questions irrelevant, unneedful? I believe not.

Countless numbers of the intelligent and the aspiring have brought their birthright to the playhouse, and there have sold it for pottage, or, refusing to do that, have turned reluctantly away and devoted their fine powers to other vocations.

Why has this been? What is wrong with the playhouse, or with the aims of these aspirants, that seemingly they are so maladjusted?

Whatever the answer, — and we shall try to seek the answer, — here undeniably is *waste;* here undeniably is an abortion of noble im-

pulses, talents, faculties, which — if we can find the remedy — may yet be dedicated to the art which boasts its Sophocles, and to the republic which aspires to excel in civilization.

In this volume, since it consists chiefly of addresses made at various places and times, there is necessarily a certain amount of repetition. But if the ideas repeated are sound, reiteration will not impair their worth; if they are unsound, reiteration will serve the useful purpose of emphasizing their defects, thus helping the cause of truth, which is their only object.

Because also of the special emphasis of this book, it is possible that some of my statements may be construed as expressions of pessimism. If so, that would be wrongly to construe my real convictions. In this volume, I may repeat, I attempt only to deal suggestively with a few important sides of a many-sided subject. Necessarily there is much hiatus and omission. But if I have sought to reveal inherent defects in existing theatrical conditions, I am none the less gladly aware of the many auspicious signs prophetic of a finer order of things.

Never before in the history of the American theatre has the future of our native drama been so splendid and secure in promise as to-day. In this undoubted fact we may well take joy and courage; ***yet we need not be blind to the true causes of the fact.*** *The true causes for the unique promise and the encouraging achievement of our drama to-day arise not from any conducive qualifications of the existing theatrical system as a private speculative business, but from that great reawakening of our national consciousness which everywhere to-day is increasingly alive to deeper significances in our life and institutions.*

In brief, our national life now claims the theatre to express itself, and to that end the theatre, sooner or later, must be overhauled and reconstructed to meet the larger needs of national life.

In America itself lies the assured renascence of American drama.

PERCY MACKAYE.

CORNISH, NEW HAMPSHIRE,
February, 1909.

SOME QUESTIONS BEFORE THE CURTAIN

CITIZENS OF THE BOXES, THE GALLERIES, AND THE STALLS: —

As one of many workers behind the curtain, I submit to you these questions before it.

It is of small importance that you answer them as I would; it is of great importance that you consider them and answer them as *you* would.

When all of the playgoers of America shall have put similar questions to themselves and answered them, then the playhouse and the play in our country will possess — what now they lack — the indispensable basis for their wholesome prosperity: *enlightened public opinion.*

Situations — Problems in action

SOME QUESTIONS BEFORE THE CURTAIN

WHAT *is* a play?

What is a good play?

Is it (to quote an eminent theatrical authority) "a play that succeeds: that's all"?

What is a bad play?

Is it (to quote the same authority) "a play that fails: that's all"?

In view of the above definitions, is "Hamlet" — being a play which has both succeeded and failed — a good play or a bad play?

If either, why?

Is a play a play before its production?

What is theatrical production? its proper relation toward the play? its proper function toward the public?

How far does the public confuse the creative work of the dramatist with the interpretative work of the actor?

How far is this confusion necessary? useful?

Is it true that plays are usually written as vehicles for particular actors?

If so, what effect is that fact likely to have upon the plays themselves, as works of dramaturgy? upon the theatrical situation? its future?

What is the rational adjustment of actor, dramatist, stage-director, to theatrical production?

If theatrical production be an art of many delicate interrelations, ought it to be ordered and harmonized by a single competent director?

Is it true that no concerted action has ever been taken in this country to establish such securely permanent theatrical conditions as shall educate and supply expert theatrical directors?

Does the lack of demand for such supply impugn the present system, which creates theatrical demand?

Does the present system create theatrical demand?

Or does the public?

What *is* public demand?

Our theatres in America are attended nightly by tens of millions of citizens: What steps have been taken to investigate whether the theatres are instituted upon a basis which tends to improve, and not to deteriorate, the citizenship of such vast numbers in qualities of taste, morality, and mentality?

Our theatres in America are the recipients annually of hundreds of millions of dollars from the people: What steps have been taken to investigate whether a much smaller contribution on the part of the people, combined with a safeguarded basis of public or private endowment, might not achieve results of greater public service than the theatre is now able to render?

What civic societies concern themselves with abuses of the theatre's proper function in the community?

What churches?

What social clubs?

What universities?

Does the public care whether a play makes money?

Is public taste a matter of public concern?

Considering once or twice in a year to be *seldom*, what proportion of our municipal communities seldom goes to the theatre?

Of what social status and degree of education is such proportion?

Since theatrical productions are reported and interpreted to the public by dramatic critics, what is the usual nature of education in dramatic criticism?

Who appoints dramatic critics?

When appointed, what standard of excellence must they maintain in order to practise their profession?

Can they be guilty of malpractice without expulsion?

Can they, on the other hand, be expelled for practising their vocation justly?

Is it always permitted to them to make impartial and unbiassed judgments?

Or are they, in any cases, constrained to

follow the particular policies of their newspapers with regard to theatrical advertisements, if they would hold their positions?

Through what channels has the public any means of being informed on these matters?

Are such channels competent? unbiassed?

Is it true that the first night of a production is usually the least representative of the play and the acting?

If so, why are first-night performances usually the only performances which are criticised?

Under present conditions, in what space of time, and under what circumstances,—conducive or not to mature judgment,—must dramatic criticisms be written?

Are these conditions acceptable to critics? to the public?

To whom *are* they acceptable?

What are the elementary *criteria* of dramatic criticism?

What are the statistics of the public's weekly attendance of the churches? of the theatres?

Have these statistics any bearing upon the

relative functions of church and theatre in the community?

If you have attended the rehearsals and performances given at the Educational Theatre for Children and Young People, New York, and also attended the rehearsals and performances of any professional theatre in the regular business on Broadway, or elsewhere, have you ever made a mental comparison of the underlying motives of the two?

In power to develop the capacity and joy of expression, which of the two is the better qualified? Why?

As a humanizing force in civilization, which is the more potent? Why?

Theatrical production arose from church ritual: Why did it diverge?

Do the historic reasons for its divergence still hold good?

What kinship, if any, has the dramatic instinct with the religious?

Considering the very wide public advertisement of theatrical personalities, what accounts

for the very limited public knowledge of the art of the theatre?

What are the wares of the theatrical business?

What local societies have been formed in our towns and cities for the purposes of investigation, study, statistics, public suggestion, regarding the conditions of acting, playwriting, theatrical management, as these are related to the public welfare?

Hundreds of social clubs in America devote a large part of their activities to considering the æsthetics of the drama in Europe: How many devote any attention to considering the specific obstacles to the æsthetics of the drama in America?

Modern actors are called upon to interpret characters drawn by the dramatist from all classes of modern society: What opportunities are provided to actors by the hours and necessities of their profession wherein to study such characters from real life?

If no such opportunity is provided to actors by their profession, how does this fact affect the competent interpretation of plays?

How does it affect the scope of the dramatist's character-drawing?

Is it true that actors are provided, by the practice of their profession, with little or no opportunity for fundamental training in the traditions of their art? in the mastery of diction? of spoken verse? of gesture? with opportunity for the comparison of their own work with that of living masters in their art?

If so, how does this lack of efficient opportunity affect the practical scope of the arts of actor and dramatist?

How may such efficient opportunity be provided?

Why should lovers of art blame theatrical managers for adopting consistent methods to improve their business?

Do lovers of art condemn business men in Wall Street for being equally consistent in their methods?

If lovers of art do not like the results of such methods, why do they not take steps to make the pursuit of better methods *logical?*

It is easy to demand self-sacrifice and financial risk from a business man: but is it reasonable?

What is meant by "the higher drama"?

To deserve that classification, must a play possess literary appeal? convey a moral? an intellectual message?

To what extent have the contemporary dramatists of Europe influenced American dramaturgy?

To what extent is this influence salutary? To what extent harmful?

Are Endowment and Subsidy by Subscription the same in principle?

If they are utterly different in principle, why are theatrical enterprises, supported by subscription, frequently referred to by authorities as "endowed theatres"?

Does not such reference obscure the real issue of endowment to the public mind?

What book has ever narrated the complete and true history of a successful play before and after its first performance?

How do exceedingly long runs of plays affect the actor? the dramatist? the public taste?

What eminent American educator has called national attention to the cause of dramatic art in this country?

How many chairs of the drama have been founded in our universities?

How much attention is given in the courses of our universities to Shakspere in the sixteenth century? How much to his art in the twentieth?

In America, committees for the critical selection and exhibition of works in sculpture are composed of expert sculptors, such as Saint-Gaudens, Barnard, French, MacMonnies: *How are committees for the critical selection and exhibition of plays composed?*

In America, committees for the critical selection and exhibition of works in painting are composed of expert painters, such as John Alexander, Edwin Blashfield, Kenyon Cox, Abbott Thayer: *How are committees for the critical selection and exhibition of plays composed?*

THE PLAYHOUSE AND THE PLAY

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IT is a prevalent tendency in the discussion of plays to place the drama as an art upon practically the same footing of artistic independence as the novel, essay, lyric, and other forms of literature. In the universities, scholarly minds frequently discuss the works of Shakspere with little or no reference to the theatrical conditions of his time. Literary clubs, critical reviews, similarly discuss the works of modern dramatists, with little or no foreknowledge of inexorable conditions which have determined the scope and form of those works. A modern poet, himself a dramatist of distinction, Mr. W. B. Yeats, writes in the Preface of his volume of plays, lately published, "The dramatist is as free as the painter of good pictures and the writer of good books." And so, in general, the literary press regards the writer of plays, estimating his work by standards similar to those by

which the worth of a novel, an essay, or a poem is estimated.

These judgments usually ignore a fundamental standard of dramatic criticism: they ignore the primary conditions which determine the very nature of a play; that is, they ignore the limiting nature of the playhouse. I propose, therefore, to discuss the nature of the playhouse as a conditioning influence upon the nature of the drama itself.

Except, however, for purposes of comparison, I shall confine our discussion to theatrical conditions in America to-day. I shall seek to make an analysis of those theatrical conditions with a view to determining the chief underlying forces, psychological and social, which cause the conditions. With this aim, I shall view the theatrical field in its widest aspect, and shall try to deal impersonally with certain large general considerations. In doing so, many statements and deductions which I shall make will probably be liable to specific exception. For the very reason that I shall deal with the working of general causes, certain

individual exceptions may — by the livelier appeal of their personal equation — appear to confute my reasoning. Such personal exceptions, however, I shall not — in the scope of this paper — have time to specify. I ask leave, therefore, to emphasize this necessary limitation at the outset. In order not to obscure the nature of a few main issues of vital importance to our subject, I shall limit myself to an impersonal discussion of the playhouse and the play.

As we find it, the nature of the playhouse is twofold. It is —

A house in which to produce plays;

A house in which to sell the product.

Thus, on the one hand, it is *the complex instrument of a special art;* and on the other, it is *the saleshouse of a special business.*

Now, as a limiting influence upon the play, this twofold nature of the playhouse is active in twofold measure: —

First, as the complex instrument of theatric art, it determines the form, or technique, of the play;

Secondly, as the saleshouse of histrionic and dramatic wares, it affects the content or scope of the play — the message of the dramatist himself, as thinker and artist.

First, then, we will consider how, as the instrument for the production of plays, the playhouse determines the technique of the play; secondly, how, as the house in which theatrical productions are for sale, the playhouse determines the scope of the dramatist's expression.

The principal elements of theatrical production are familiar to every one. They are the play, actors, stage, scenery, light effects, orchestral music, etc. Now, as one among these, the play may dominate the other elements or it may be subordinated to the others. Thus the relative emphasis of these elements is the basis for the organization of theatrical productions under their familiar special classes: "Legitimate Drama," Vaudeville, Grand Opera, Musical Comedy, etc.

If it be granted, however, that dramatic art is a form of expression fitted and ordained to convey an intellectual message, the ideal

proportion of these elements in theatrical production will be that in which the Play — the element of the creative Idea—is dominant.

Yet, granting this, it is nevertheless clear that the other elements thus subordinated will still exert a limiting influence upon the form or technique of the play. So, for example, the out-door stage, the facial mask, the chorus, the permanent scene, were elements of ancient production which conditioned the dramatic technique of the Greeks; so, also, the bare, three-sided platform, the up-stage exit, the curtainless climax of acts, the "plastic" groupings of the actors, conditioned the craftsmanship of Shakspere. And so the picture-scenes of our modern stage, its curtain, its footlights, its wings and scenery, its modern time-limit of performance, based on the exigencies of our evening hours, and the anxieties of "commuters"; its time-divisions into acts, adjusted psychologically to the concentrative power of our audiences: these things, and more, determine our modern dramaturgy.

The playhouse, in brief, is a complex and delicate instrument, comparable, one might say, to a gigantic organ. The compositions which are written for it must, therefore, be practically adapted to its special qualities and limitations as an instrument — to the scope of its various stops. Thus, as all musical compositions are not necessarily organ scores, all dialogues are not necessarily plays. The playhouse, not less than the organ, predetermines its special compositions.

All this is perhaps obvious and trite, yet it is so frequently ignored by current criticism and discussion of plays, that it has seemed worthy of preliminary mention in order to clarify our subject. We need not, however, dwell upon it longer.

So much, then, for the limiting influence of theatrical *production* upon dramatic *technique*, — for the limiting influence of the playhouse, in its first aspect as a complex instrument of art, upon the play.

We come now to a far more important limiting influence upon our drama, and one

far less understood as being such; namely, the influence of the playhouse in its second aspect — the limiting influence of theatrical *business* upon the *scope and content* of plays.

In its second aspect, the playhouse is, as we have said, a house of private business, for the sale of histrionic and dramatic commodities. The elements of theatrical production, then, are not merely the elements of an art for the people — they are also the manager's wares. Among these elements, it is immaterial to him as a business man which element shall dominate as long as it makes him money. In his capacity as merchant, he prefers only that which will sell the highest, or to the greatest number, or both. If "The Merry Wives of Windsor" draws better then "Florodora," he prefers "The Merry Wives"; and *vice versa*. He is concerned simply with commercial supply and demand.

What, then, in general, does the public demand from a theatrical production? In one word, diversion, — diversion by some kind of stimulation. Roughly speaking, human

nature is susceptible of three kinds of stimulation — intellectual, æsthetic, emotional.

The appeal of the first is to the intellect alone; of the second, to the intellect and the senses combined; of the third, to the senses alone. Now the drama is an art whose function is to convey an intellectual appeal by means of an appeal to the senses. Which of these three kinds of stimulation, then, will ideally be best adapted for the drama to excite? Clearly not the first, which appeals to the intellect alone; nor the third, which appeals to the senses alone; but the second, which appeals to both combined. Æsthetic stimulation, then, is ideally adapted for the drama to excite. It is, therefore, the rational aim of dramatic art. But is it adapted to the greatest public demand?

Of these three kinds of stimulation, which kind is most strongly, permanently, universally desired?

Psychology predicts, and experience proves, that of these three the kind which most strongly, most permanently, most universally is desired,

is the third — emotional stimulation; and the kind which is least strongly, least permanently, least universally desired, is the first — intellectual stimulation.

The reasonable policy of the manager, therefore, is clear. As a sound business man, it becomes his policy to provide the least possible amount of the first kind of stimulation, and the greatest possible amount of the third kind. The second kind,— æsthetic stimulation, — he may reasonably ignore altogether, as a superfluous combination. *Thus it becomes the rational aim of theatrical business to ignore the rational aim of dramatic art.* Moreover, if he is to be a wise and enterprising business man, the manager will, by judicious advertisement and the organization of his business, endeavor to increase and deepen the demand for emotional stimulation, and to lessen and nullify the demand for intellectual stimulation.

Thus modern theatrical business is based broadly and firmly in human psychology on *the law of increasing emotional and decreasing*

intellectual demand, a law which is accelerated by the night-weariness of our strenuous modern days. This law I shall name *the Law of Dramatic Deterioration*.[1]

The general course and effects of this law, or tendency, though evident in any given theatrical season, are better traceable over a space of years, and by comparison with conditions in other lands. Originally, in America, when actors themselves were frequently both business men and artists, taking the financial risk, but revelling in the æsthetics of "the profession," the motive of theatrical production was often based more in the art of acting than in the box office. Acting, however, not dramaturgy, was then the chief goal of artistic aspiration in the theatre.[2] The Law of Dramatic Deterioration, then, as affecting the actor, was not infrequently counteracted by the personal sacrifice of actors themselves, and limited in scope by the scale of theatrical business. And to-day, in France and Germany, where the dramatist and the

[1] See Comment on page 199. [2] See page 202.

trained director are major influences in the theatre, the chief emphasis of production is not upon gross receipts, but upon dramatic art. The Law of Deterioration there is permanently counteracted by the rational principles of endowment. To-day in America, however, the case is different; now the Law of Dramatic Deterioration is able to operate consistently, and practically unimpeded. Neither artistic self-sacrifice, nor endowment, prevents the vast scale of its working.[1] The reasons for this are simple. The same causes which during the last two decades have created the harmonious organization of the great industries and utilities of our nation for their own commercial ends, have operated also — and are still operating — to organize the theatre as a business upon an immense scale of efficiency and inward harmoniousness for its own ends. What are those ends? They are not many; they are one. *The single end*

[1] Other great forces, however, do powerfully combat and check this law. These forces are briefly discussed in the Comment on page 199.

of theatrical enterprise is to make money. Why should it not be? Such is the simple end of all other private business enterprise. If the playhouse is legitimately a house of business, to make an exception of theatrical enterprise is therefore absurd. It is the clear and consistent recognition of this sound analogy which has reorganized and enlarged our theatrical business, and established it to-day upon the strong rock of the Law of Dramatic Deterioration. The aim of theatrical business has not always been clearly perceived by artists, who are managers. They have sought to reconcile the aim of art with the aim of money-making: a policy resulting inevitably in frequent self-sacrifice and ultimate failure. Occasionally, to be sure, such managers have been successful; they adopt methods which seek at once to produce the best art possible and to make the most money possible. But such methods cannot hope permanently to succeed; for they are based on a divided energy, and a divided law.[1] *The manager who adopts methods which*

[1] See Comment on page 199.

singly and consistently develop the widest field that exists in human psychology will inevitably outstrip all less consistent competitors. To-day, then, with the increasing adoption of those logical methods by commercial experts, minds frankly and sincerely divorced from all interest in dramatic art as such, the theatre in America is attaining unprecedented success and power, and holds forth the promise of fortunes undreamed of in the past.

When, therefore, the commercial manager points to this impressive vindication of his methods in achieving success, we can only agree with him that his methods are admirably effectual, and his aims surpassingly achieved. But we are concerned with a different matter; we are concerned with the methods and aims of dramatic art. To our present discussion, "the play's the thing." How does all that we have been discussing affect the play — the work of the dramatist?

"The dramatist," says Mr. Yeats, "is as free as the painter of good pictures and the writer of good books."

Is he? Is the dramatist to-day, who writes good plays and would have his plays produced, as free as the painter of good pictures, who would have his paintings exhibited, and the writer of good books, who would have his works published?

We have seen before that the dramatist must, in his art, meet the limiting demands of the stage itself in order to write a truly practical play; that is, a play technically fit for production. By so doing, however, he perfects his work as a work of art, for thereby he shapes it to perform its proper function.

We are now ready to see that, besides those inevitable limiting constructive demands of stagecraft, the dramatist must also meet the limiting (usually) destructive demands of theatrical business, in order to write a so-called "practical" play; that is, a play likely to be produced.

Now, of course, a truly practical play may include the province of the so-called practical play, and fulfil both these demands; that is to say, — a play which is adapted by its own

technical perfection for stage performance may also be adapted to "draw," and so make money, — or, it may not be so adapted. That will depend upon the content, or message of the play: what its dramatist, by means of the play's technique, has to say to the audience. If he says what the audience demands, that is, what it likes, his play will draw and make money; otherwise not. Obviously, then, *if public demand must be followed and not guided*, the dramatist's expression must depend upon the nature of his theatrical audience, — the degree of its taste and mentality which are the causes of its demand. But this demand, as now diligently cultivated by the playhouse, is the law of increasing emotional and decreasing intellectual demand, — the Law of Dramatic Deterioration. We have seen that the working of this law is admirably adapted to fulfil the requirements of theatrical business. But the question arises: Is it adapted to fulfil the requirements of dramatic art?

"Dramatic art," says Mr. Yeats again in

his Preface, "is a method of expression, and neither an hair-breadth escape nor a love affair more befits it than the passionate exposition of the most delicate and strange intuitions." But in this, the experienced manager does not agree with Mr. Yeats. Of all reliable factors of his experience, hair-breadth escapes and love affairs chiefly befit "dramatic art" as he conceives it.

And why this preference on the part of the manager for such factors of experience, rather than for "the most passionate exposition of the most delicate and strange intuitions," or than for a thousand larger dramatic themes expressible only by fine art? Why does he prefer to deal in the reliable "hair-breadth escape" and the long-tested "love affair"?

For the same reason that a gentleman's furnisher prefers rather to deal in dress shirts and socks than in dry-goods and woollen stuffs. He has acquired his stock in trade and his constituency. It is conceivable that a change of specialty from socks to suitings might meet with financial success; but since he caters to

his own restricted public, the result of such a change would be dubious.

So, too, the manager has acquired his specialty and his restricted public; so, also, to change his stock in trade, — to shift, let us say, from musical comedy to psychological drama, — might lose him *his* constituency — his clientele. In a business wherein he has invested thousands, possibly hundreds of thousands, of dollars, to experiment in new brands and labels might prove ruinous; precarious it would be, in any event.

Certain emotional commodities — such as hair-breadth escapes and love affairs — have proved for him "a sure thing" in the past, and as such are not to be departed from. For the motto of theatrical business is this: that what has once made money will, rehashed, make money again. A policy with many unseen flaws, proved by as many financial failures; but a simple policy, with large promise of security. Thus commercial necessity produces artistic monotony. This monotony, as a result of that policy, is most clearly

observable in those departments of the theatrical business where the creative artist is least dominant; in musical comedy, for instance, where one needs only to compare the popular songs of one season with those of another, to recognize their basic identity. Thus, by financial necessity, the great dramatic ranges of creative thought and imagination are left practically unexplored, uncultivated; and the public itself, by the very nature of conditions, is prevented from enlarging its horizon.

True, a certain scope of variety in our plays is permissible, even profitable, as novelty. For, as when this year's fashion substitutes a loose-knit tie for last year's ascot, or a soaring picture hat for last season's toque, even so it is with our plays; this season's cowboy is substituted as hero for last season's exiled baronet; the Lady from Lanes for the Lady of Lyons. Now London drama is the fashion; and now the edict goes forth that "American plays will be worn."

And this, let us observe, — all this is said to be *public demand;* on all sides, in press,

and club, and theatre, it is labelled and accepted as "public demand." But how much does the public really demand, or control, the fashions in dress and merchandise? Negatively, a very little; positively, not at all. Those fashions are set by an undeterminable few, or are set, through the mutual conference of its leaders, by commercial policies of the trade. These policies occasionally the public may restively kick against or reject; but this negative protest is indulged in very seldom. Almost universally the public — the great people — is docile: to the bag-cut trousers, or the balloon-shaped sleeves, it submits as a sheep to the shearer. No more does the real public — the great people — demand or control the fashions in plays. Negatively, it may reject, by staying away; and this prerogative a considerable percentage of the public makes use of nearly all the time; for it very seldom goes near the theatre at all because its taste is very seldom pleased there; and the remaining greater percentage of regular theatre-goers stays away whenever

its taste is not pleased. But that taste of the regular theatre-goer, which is so generally labelled and accepted as "public demand," is not really a positive, initial factor of demand, but it is a reflex factor resulting from the education which the play-goer has received from decades of business policy in building up a theatrical constituency; and that policy is based on the aforesaid psychological Law of Dramatic Deterioration, which expresses itself in the motto: "What has once made money will, rehashed, make money again."

Thus so-called "public demand" is really nothing more than *the negative demand of a particular constituency of play-goers*, long educated under those business conditions.

But to the demands of this constituency the dramatist, in his capacity of manufacturer for the theatrical retailer, is asked and required to bow. That is, he is required to adapt his work not primarily to the requirements of dramatic art, but to the requirements of theatrical business. If he believes in the existence of a real public demand for

glimpses of the vast unexplored ranges of dramatic art, or if he believes that such a demand *might be created and cultivated* in the public, he may keep those convictions to himself, for — naturally enough — they are of no interest to the retailer.

When, therefore, Mr. Yeats says, "The dramatist is as free as the painter of good pictures," etc., we may perhaps see more clearly than before how he declares for his fellow-artists an ideal truth, which, if spoken in the theatre box office, would ring like irony.

For the painter of good pictures, though he is frequently permitted by an ignoring public to starve, has never yet been encouraged to do his worst or his middling best, *in order to attain preëminence as a painter;* on the contrary, he knows that, to achieve that preeminence, he must pit his highest powers against the masters, and not the middlemen of his art; and he knows that the public galleries and salons where his works are selected for exhibition, are controlled and directed by his fellow-artists, and not by mer-

chants of his art; that his work will be passed upon by a jury of his fellow-craftsmen who have attained distinction, — a jury who, presumably, will accept or reject his work according to standards of artistic excellence alone, — not by a jury of merchants, whose standards of selection *necessarily* are those of the demands of their constituency and of their own personal profit.

A jury of one's peers and masters in art — does the public realize what that means to the artist? What that means to the public itself? For the painter, the result in his art is not only the incentive to excel, but *the necessity for excelling;* for his public, the result is the maintenance of standards of comparison and appreciation in that art, set, not by their own untutored whims and vagaries, or by the long mis-schooling of their instincts, but by the skilled judgment of chosen creative artists.

Such a necessity for excellence results in the survival of the really fittest! Such competition every true artist is joyous to engage in.

The musical composer — he, too, may pit his best powers against the masters, and find a select body of his peers ready to welcome his work, to judge it, and to choose it for acclaim singly by the standards of his art. But where would the works of our native composers — of MacDowell, and Parker, and Converse — be played, if no endowed symphony orchestras existed? In what commercial concert hall or music pavilion would they be heard? Or what musical menu would be served by our symphony orchestras themselves if, by necessity, their directors must first consult for their programme *the selective judgment of a popular constituency, educated for generations in the demands of average taste?*

Yet such is the judgment which the producer of plays is compelled to consult. We need hardly wonder, therefore, that the frequent effect of this necessity upon dramatic production as an art is as if the symphony orchestra, bereft of its director, should disintegrate into a jargon of flute-solos, fiddle-duets, and tattoos of the snare-drum.

For the painter, the sculptor, the musical composer, — for each in his craft, exists a jury of his peers or masters. For the dramatist, none. *For him, such a jury is not even dreamed of; as conditions are, it could not possibly exist.* Yet let us be sure of this; that, if there be any pertinent truth in the analogies I have drawn, that dream for our drama must yet be dreamed and realized, those conditions which are, must cease to be, and those which are better must be established.

In order, however, to realize for our theatre these better conditions of enlightenment and leadership, it is needful for us to understand existing conditions fundamentally, so that we may seek to reform them, not with personal vindictiveness, but with impersonal reasonableness. In this reform we are concerned with an inward opposition of functions in the playhouse — the opposition of the functions of art and of business. *We are concerned, therefore, not with a conflict of persons and personalities, but with a conflict of social and psychological forces.* The forces of commer-

cial demand and supply result, as we have seen, in the operation of an accelerative tendency, or law, which I have called the Law of Dramatic Deterioration. This Law is opposed to the rational aim of dramatic art. To solve our problem fundamentally, then, and to establish our reform in the playhouse permanently, the operation of this baneful law must be checked by understanding and removing its causes; and as a substitute, the operation of a beneficent law must be set in motion, by understanding and utilizing *its* causes. Now the causes for the operation of the Law of Dramatic Deterioration are the forces of commercial demand and supply. Therefore, to annul that law, the forces of commercial demand and supply must be permanently annulled in the playhouse. As a substitute for those forces, *the forces of artistic competition must take their place*, and set in motion *a law creative of æsthetic demand and supply* — a law which may appropriately be called *the Law of Dramatic Regeneration.* By this means, the skilled judgment of acknowl-

edged masters in dramatic art will select, from among competing dramatists, the fittest to survive; and in turn this selection, through artistic competition, will by its supply create a responsive demand in the public, who will thus, for the first time, acquire unconsciously self-discipline in taste, and cultivate for themselves in the playhouse a joy which does not pall. Just as the competitions of American sculptors are passed upon by a jury of men like French, Barnard, MacMonnies, and the late Augustus Saint-Gaudens, acknowledged masters in sculpture, so is it equally fitting and necessary that the works of competing American dramatists should be passed upon by the selective judgment of supreme craftsmen in dramatic art.

The greatest need of the playhouse to-day is this survival of the truly fittest, by the substitution of artistic competition for commercial catering.

Why, then, is this need not remedied? Who is responsible for the undesirable conditions which exist?

It has become the habit of many intelligent persons devoted to the higher interests of the drama to accuse the commercial managers, as individuals, for the existence of the evils of the playhouse. But this accusation is both wrong and unreasonable; the blame does not lie there. *Conditions, not individuals, are to blame.* If all the individuals who sway the business management of our theatres were to resign or die to-day, to-morrow would see their places filled by persons pursuing the very same policies as their predecessors. And this would necessarily be so. *It is absurd to demand that a business man shall ruin his private business. It is not absurd, however, to demand that a private business, whose legitimate function is that of a public art, shall be revolutionized to perform that function properly, by ceasing to be a business.* Not the commercial instincts of the manager, but the commercial functions of the theatre, are illegitimate, in the interests of public welfare. Not, therefore, the manager, nor the star, nor the dramatist, is chiefly responsible for the

needless slavery of our drama; not they, but the public — and preëminently, *the leading spirits of our communities*, its powerful citizens and its educators — *are responsible*. For they are responsible for the toleration of the two-fold nature of the playhouse, — a nature which makes dramatic art at war with itself and, while its double function exists, *a perpetual menace to the higher interests of society*.

You also whom I now address are in part responsible. You are responsible for creating — or failing to create — enlightened public opinion, whereby the American playhouse may be established as an institution adapted to guide and lead the American people by the art of the play. Alone, the writer of plays to-day can do little toward such an end. Unlike his fellow creative artists, the playwright is not expected to guide public taste, but to cater to it. When the playhouse, however, shall become the authentic instrument of dramatic leadership — of the creative idea, the playwright will then become a very powerful factor in guiding public taste. His art will then

become, for the first time, an effectual influence for public enlightenment; and the dramatist who most excels in his art will then be the most powerful public leader. Until that time comes, however, the onus of responsibility lies upon you — the intelligent public.

And this leads me to the consideration of a third limiting influence of the playhouse: one which, though less specific than the other two, is all-important; namely, the limiting influence of *the status of the playhouse in the community* upon the whole of dramatic art.

The first limiting influence — that of stagecraft — we saw to be constructive and beneficial to the art of dramaturgy. The second — that of box-office policy — we saw to be destructive and harmful to the scope of the dramatist's conception. The third — that of social status — we shall see to be beneficial or harmful, stimulating or destructive, to both dramatic conception and to dramaturgy, according as the attitude of the public shall determine.

But, it may again be objected, if the art of the playhouse were already of higher calibre, its esteem in the community would be higher.

To which I reply, The reverse of this objection is the necessary first step to its solution. *If the esteem of the community for dramatic art were higher, the status of the playhouse would be higher.*

What, then, is the reasonable and fitting esteem in which dramatic art should be held by the community? What potential qualities does the drama of its nature possess for the reverence and esteem of the public?

The drama is peculiarly an art for the people; it epitomizes the hearts of millions in an individual; it is capable — as no other art is capable — of summing up and expressing the vital conflicts and aspirations of a race; the scope and gamut of a nation's consciousness. It has power to rekindle the past, to foreshadow the future, of mankind, by moving images which impress their form upon the plastic present. In essential dignity and power

to inspire, it has the same rights to the reverence of a people as the spirit of religion, to which it is akin.

The drama of the ancients had its origin beside the altars of their gods; enacted upon a hallowed stage, it expressed the aspiration, joy, and passion of a people. The modern drama had likewise its origin in the popular heart of religion; under the arches of mediæval cathedrals, it bodied forth to the multitude images of heaven and hell; under its charm, the rude mob was refined, the garlic-eating crowds were moved to pity and awe and sympathetic delight.

Those times have passed away, yet neither the nature of the drama nor of humanity has changed. To-day, as in every age, the drama remains the elemental art of man, and as long as humanity remains sacred to humanity, so long will the drama demand human reverence. Because of this elemental capacity, the drama, more than any other art, may express man's passionate joy of life, whereby its works are felicitously called *plays*. The playhouse,

then, is properly *the house of the joy of life, dedicated to the Genius of Aspiration. The function of a temple is its only legitimate function.*

But that same oblique-eyed spirit which broke the beautiful idols of fauns and Grecian deities, and smashed the images of stained-glass saints, long since looked upon the living images of the playhouse with suspicion, and shattered the earlier ideals of play and players with contempt. The iconoclast and the Puritan combined to close the doors of the playhouse as a public temple of the joy of life; and over its doors, suspended, they placed Satan, with Miltonian wings, to shed darkness on the drama, obscuring its religious function from the people. And so to-day, though the Puritan has departed and Satan has lost his anathema, and though the people once more flock back in multitudes to the playhouse, yet they no longer enter it as a public temple; new generations have forgotten that ever it was one, for they find it occupied by private merchants; and the joy

of life which they view there is no longer dedicated to their common aspiration.

Yet all this is not due to the nature of the people, or of the playhouse; it is due to a historical misconception of the playhouse. That misconception once removed from the public mind, there is no reason why the playhouse should not revert permanently to its original beneficent function.

The righting of this mighty misconception has indeed already begun in numerous places. One of the most winning and notable instances is the work — or rather the emancipating play — of the child-players at the Educational Theatre in New York. Those children, whose leaders, with exceptional insight, have provided their spontaneous expression with discipline, have adopted, with simple ardor, the earliest ideal of the playhouse. Poor, neglected, overworked in the sweatshops by day, they turn at night to their playhouse as to a place hallowed by the joy of life, and enact their plays like ritual hymns chanted to that resident deity of Delight. The Educational

Theatre for children and young people is building a solid corner-stone for an ideal theatre in America. It is not only imbuing our youngest generations with reverence for a great public art, but it is modestly exemplifying for the intelligent public certain vital issues of the drama. How long, then, will the intelligent public continue to ignore those vital issues as they apply to the whole drama of our nation? Certainly it cannot be intelligent and ignore them longer. For our drama is a tide of living influence; strong and impetuous as mighty waters loosed, nightly it rolls over the tired nation, and reanimates its waning forces — *for better or for worse.*

So vast an influence it behooves a people to regulate for their own good. We that expend, in a generation, millions on millions to establish strong reservoirs of uncontaminated water, to supply our cities and their aqueducts — how much have we expended, in a century, to preserve pure for our people the well-springs of our drama? — Nothing; far less than nothing; for we have done the very opposite

of this, and increasingly have given our support, in money and public opinion, to a noxious misconception of the playhouse and the play.

In what civic club — in what pulpit — in what benevolent society — in what organization of leading citizens — have we heard rumors of zeal to investigate this scandal? What chemist experts have tested the diluted poisons which so often distil from those ubiquitous tap-rooms — our theatres? What mass meetings of educators have been called to renovate and cleanse those fountains of our public taste and mentality? You know the answer. These things are ignored — universally ignored. Yet, until these things shall be realized, until we as a people shall rouse ourselves to investigate and understand the ideal nature of the playhouse, — its true function in the community, and the potential grandeur of that function in transfusing our common life with agencies of higher public welfare, then to compare with that the bathos and folly of existing conditions, — let not the critical and hopeful minority ask, or

expect, an effectual renascence of our drama. For I repeat — and it is well to repeat — that deeper than the limiting influences of stage-craft and theatrical business upon the form and scope of our plays, is the limiting influence of the public attitude toward the whole institution of the theatre upon dramatic art itself.

Sporadically, interruptedly, a particular artist, or group of artists, may, by dint of indomitable desire, patience, or special opportunity, rise up, combat conditions, and be heard. But *upon this can be founded no universal movement, no permanent tradition,* of national drama. The individual artist may perhaps make temporary headway, but, until conditions are changed, he can hope to leave no lasting bulwarks against the strong, perennial billows of commercialism.

Commercialism: this is a hackneyed word, but it names a potent force; a force which, however it may conduce to the welfare of individuals, serves no useful end in art or in democracy. Realization of this fact has long

since banished commercialism from our churches, our public schools, our public libraries, our universities, our symphony orchestras; the same realization is banishing it from other public utilities and arts; the same realization must banish it forever as a vital force from our theatres.

Such is the only permanent remedy for the evils we are discussing, and there can be no compromise.

The status of the playhouse in society is as vital as the status of the university in society. The dignity and efficiency of the one demand the same safeguarding against inward deterioration as the dignity and efficiency of the other. The functions of both are educative. And if the special function of the playhouse be to produce civic-inspiring art, and of the university civic-inspiring scholarship, *why* — by what standard, rational or ethical — is the playhouse left to perform its proper function, utterly exposed to the temptations and corruptions of commercial supply and demand, while the university is bastioned, in the serene

performance of its function, by the strong walls of endowment?

Imagine the converse of this. Imagine a university utterly devoid of endowment: a university of which the president, as innocent of all the arts and sciences as he is of English grammar, dictates his policies of private gain to a board of directors, organized to hire a half-tutored faculty, and outwit one another for personal profit; a faculty, gathered from every walk of life, to perform in the lecture halls strange gymnastics and magician's wonders, for the delectation of undergraduates; a professor of classics, strayed haphazard from some nobler foreign institution, in his heart still the vision of sane learning and a beautiful tradition, deputed now to translate Homer into slang, lest his professorship shall be cancelled and his family starve; and between the Homeric cantos — that concentration may not weary the students — a doctor of philosophy rises to improvise on the bagpipes, while the Instructor of Fine Arts lately graduated from the barroom, *summa cum laude*, accom-

panies the philosopher — amid thunders of applause — by a clog dance.

A grotesque supposition; yes, grotesque; but let us remember this: *being devoid of endowment, that university would have to adapt itself to commercial demand and supply,* and consequently that grotesque condition would exist *by necessity* — commercial necessity — *in order that the university might survive!*

But would there be any *public use* for the survival of such a university? Would its survival be the survival of anything really fit to survive?

Would the leading citizens and educators of America tolerate a condition of affairs in which such a grotesque kind of university was the only kind in existence? Or would they rebel, and raise a sufficient sum of money to revolutionize that absurd condition, — a sum, namely, sufficient to transplant that institution of the arts and sciences out of the sterile soil of commercial supply and demand, and replant it for all time in the virile soil of

artistic competition? Would they do this, or not?

That would doubtless depend upon the nature of intelligent public opinion. *But that grotesque institution would probably have educated the so-called intelligent public to be satisfied with it. In any event, the public could hardly expect that institution itself to reform itself out of existence.*

No; reform would have to begin from outside. In all effectual movements for public enlightenment, reform must begin with the intelligent demand of a few for the establishment of proper conditions, which will create and educate the same intelligent demand from the many. In the theatre, as in the university, *those proper conditions are the conditions of endowment.*[1] But for John Harvard and Elihu Yale, centuries ago, the organized cultivation of the humanities in America might not have emerged from chaotic neglect — who can say till how many years later? In those primitive New England days, to be sure,

[1] See Comment on page 205.

our public benefactors were only concerned with their thousands; to-day, they seek a beneficent use for their millions.

Where, then, to-day is a John Harvard for the humanities of our theatre? An Elihu Yale for the higher ministrations of dramatic art?

But — I hear the retort — your analogy is not sound; the universities are concerned with education, the theatres with amusement.

Let us not be deceived by names.

In theatrical amusement we are concerned with public happiness. Real happiness means education; real education means happiness. And in regard to our drama there can be no sounder, no more enlightening, conviction than this truth: that by whatever name we choose to call it, the influence of our theatres is a colossal, a national influence in forming the taste, the moral will, the mental capacity, of our people. Whether we know it or not, our theatres are supplied — in passion, imagination, and delight — with means of appeal far more potent than any possessed by

our schools and colleges; and whether we like it or not, night after night, year after year, our theatres *are* educating our people, by the millions and tens of millions. The question is, *Shall the theatres educate those millions right, or wrong?*

I have sought to make clear the relation of play to playhouse, and the double nature of the existing playhouse — to this end, that in seeking a rational solution for its problems, we may henceforth consider the legitimate function of the playhouse as *single*, and not double; as a function of an art for the people, not of a private business. In brief, I have sought simply to clarify public opinion with reason. For a reasonable understanding has entered little into the public's notice of the playhouse. For him who has ears and eyes, the misuse and misconception of the theatre's function are flagrant; they beckon and shout at us from the streets of all our cities.

What is to be done?

From all we have been considering, it is clear that: —

First: The playhouse, as an institution in America, is a vital concern of the American people.

Second: As such, the efficient *regulation* of its functions to the ends of greatest public service is the concern of the *leaders* of the American people — *our eminent educators, our civic societies, our powerful and altruistic citizens.*

Third: Reformation of the playhouse is not a matter of reforming individuals, but of reforming conditions.

Fourth: The efficient regulation of the functions of the playhouse to the ends of greatest public service is impossible without reformation, owing to the present operation of the law of commercial demand and supply, which is identical with the Law of Dramatic Deterioration.

Fifth: As the chief vital act of reform, therefore, the operation of the Law of Dramatic Deterioration must be permanently checked, and the Law of Dramatic Regeneration must be substituted for it; that is, *the motive of*

commercial demand and supply must be supplanted by the motive of artistic competition for the awards of master craftsmen.

Thus for the first time in America, the playhouse will be free to become an institution of leadership in public service.

To this end, one means — first, last, and indispensable — is demanded: *absolute endowment for absolute freedom.*[1]

[1] See Comment on page 205.

THE DRAMA OF DEMOCRACY

THE DRAMA OF DEMOCRACY

IN the year 1837, before the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Cambridge, Mass., Ralph Waldo Emerson made his declaration of independence for the American Scholar. Rising to address that body of scholars, he said: "Perhaps the time is already come when the sluggard intellect of this continent will look from under its iron lids, and fill the postponed expectations of the world with something better than the exertions of mechanical skill. Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close. The millions that around us are rushing into life, cannot always be fed on the sere remains of foreign harvests. Events, actions, arise, that must be sung, that will sing themselves. Who can doubt that poetry will revive and lead in a new age, and one day be the pole-star for a thousand years?"

And in concluding his address, he said: "Mr. President and Gentlemen, this confidence in the unsearched might of man belongs, by all motives, by all prophecy, by all preparation, to the American Scholar. We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe. The spirit of the American freeman is already suspected to be timid, imitative, tame. Public and private avarice make the air we breathe thick and fat. Young men of the fairest promise, who begin life upon our shores, inflated by the mountain winds, shined upon by all the stars of God, find the earth below not in unison with these, — but are hindered from action by the disgust which the principles on which business is managed inspire, and turn drudges, or die of disgust, — some of them suicides. What is the remedy? They did not yet see, and thousands of young men as hopeful now crowding to the barriers for the career, do not yet see, that if the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts, and there abide, the huge world will come round to him. Brothers and friends —

we will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds."

It is now seventy years since those words were first spoken. They were revolutionary for all time, and the native bloom and growth of self-reliance which Emerson then predicted have since been evidenced, gradually but indubitably, through three generations of our American scholars, poets, and artists.

Yet in one vast field of art and opportunity, there has shown but a faint Spring and a fainter harvest of indigenous confidence and growth. The American Drama still lies fallow for the seed of the native poet; the American theatre, its institution, stands walled, and well-nigh hermetically sealed, against the possible percolations of American scholarship and poetry. For this important effect there are simple and important causes. Not, however, now to analyze the reasons for this unnatural torpidity in so vital an art as the drama, it becomes us none the less to ponder deeply the indisputable fact, and to consider

that, as the true scholar has been defined by that same philosopher as "man thinking," so is it now more than ever incumbent upon the American dramatist that he be truly a scholar within that broad definition.

In view, therefore, of this responsibility, there may, I think, be made to-day a like prediction of independence specifically for the American drama to that which seventy years ago was made, in general, for American scholarship; independence, that is, as well from the persuasive "Muses of Europe," as from their persuaded minstrels in America; independence wherein are summed up self-knowledge, self-reliance, and the realization of the unique function and the divergent opportunity which are potential in the drama of our democracy.

It is needless to remind ourselves of the incalculable debt in art, letters, and civilization, which we owe to those Muses of Europe and of England; it is as needless to reflect that, in this modern day, with increasing ratio, all corners of the earth are conspiring to be-

come one in mutual understanding; that world-ideals are being substituted for local ideals; that the phonograph joke and the dance hall proverb are interchangeable symbols among the nations, that the Peace Conference has twice met, and that the parliament of man is a rational presumption. All this needs not even to be granted; it is so.

But in asking you to consider in dramatic art an ideal of independence, of national diversity, of American self-reliance, I am suggesting nothing which is in conflict with any world-ideal worthy of reason. For if there shall ever be met a parliament of man, in the arts as well as politics, assuredly it shall never meet for the negation of man, but it shall be the richer and mightier for every positive contribution of distinctive experience and tradition which each member shall conserve from his own inheritance and bring to it — the Asiatic, the European, the American, each contributive of his peculiar zone and meridian of wisdom, harmonized by the ethics of a common human interest.

In America, therefore, where our Cyclopean industries of iron and gold and brass and blazing ores sit on our Appalachians and our Rockies and, like so many Polyphemi, gaze down with fiery eyes upon their smoking hearth-stones — ten thousand cities with their consumed humanity; in America, where again the silent forests range, solitude after solitude, millions of acres, and you shall hear nothing but the water-falls and the wind, and behold nothing but far peaks and endless pines shadowing their own twilight; in America, where our sky-scrapers, tower on tower, build another Sidon in mid-air; where the electric mules tunnel our river-bottoms, and our huddled citizens build conglomerate homes like mud-wasps; in America, if we shall look around us with fresh eyes, and if, with fresh vision, we peer into that Yankee past which produced us, and beyond to the horizon of cosmopolitan promise which is our destiny to come, surely in this America we shall discover, in riches, more than the raw stuff of our bank accounts; in art, more than a mere

standing-place whence we may crane our pygmy necks toward Rome and the Old World; in prophecy, more than the *bourgeois* hope of imitation and self-disguise.

Yes, in all this native material, I think we shall discover national incentives, distinctive sources of appeal, indigenous seeds of growth for the renascence of a popular drama such as, in possibilities of splendour and magnitude, has not been surpassed in history. But to this end it is obligatory that we understand ourselves and our theatrical situation thoroughly. Such a renascence may be, or it may not be, according as the American public does or does not inform itself, according as the American dramatist does or does not liberate himself. It is not enough that we detect pernicious theatrical conditions, if we do not renovate them altogether; it is not enough if we shall half see the potentialities of American drama through eyes educated and enamoured of European ideals; we must see them wholly, distinctly, freshly, through eyes enamoured of what they behold, and

so body their large spirit forth in works unadulterated, at once American and universal.

In the iris of this clear vision, two great motes are lodged as obstacles that blur it. These are:—

First, Our theatrical conditions.

Second, The exotic nature of our dramatic ideals. The first is all-important objectively, the second, subjectively.

No extremity of emphasis probably could overstate the influence of the nature of our theatres, as private commercial enterprise, in retarding the growth of American drama as the essential art and expression of national life. A revolution in the existing system is as necessary a premise to the emancipation of the drama as a fine art, as that security of endowment which has established to the Symphony Orchestras their liberty and success — a *greater* revolution, moreover, in proportion as the drama is, of its nature, a more vital and universal self-expression of the people. But this is a matter which, in itself, would require the full measure of this paper to dis-

cuss, and as I have sought to analyze it elsewhere,[1] I must here dismiss its consideration. I will merely repeat that it is of prime importance to our subject. That ground must be cleared and its encumbrances removed, before ever the stately fabric of a national drama can be builded.

The second obstacle to the development of a national drama of world-status in America is, as I have said, the exotic nature of our dramatic ideals. I might better call it the suburbanite nature of our ideals. From whatever causes, it so happens that a majority of the educated, and the intellectual amongst us, though robustly American in citizenship, remain, in art and æsthetic aspiration, suburbanites of Paris, Berlin, Rome, London, whence they have, in their happier leisure, drawn their ideals. Around the great lights of those world-centres, mothlike, they flutter and revolve, happy to singe the native hues of their own modest wings and antennæ in the fires of those transatlantic stars which blaze upon

[1] In The Playhouse and the Play.

our darkness. So, in dramatic art, the intelligent in America are early educated in suburbanite ideals. That is to say, looking to the best and most inspired dramas which modern Europe offers us, and rejoicing in the technique and beauty of those master works, these Americans would appropriate the masters to themselves, and substitute as ideals the foreign motives and technique, which have rightly made those artists masters in their own lands, for the original incentives and the native craftsmanship, which alone can create for us masters and ideals in America.

Not to analyze here the relative merits and influences of English and Continental dramatists, it is noteworthy to our subject that the contemporary influence of European upon American drama and dramatic criticism resolves itself — through various channels of genius — into the dominant influence of Ibsen. Now the technique of every master is adapted to his message. No artist can be subtracted from or superadded to, what he has to say; and the talisman of the master artist is per-

fect adaptation of means to end. To a thousand prophets, as many arts of prophecy. When, therefore, Ibsen is designated by the critical as the dramatic master for us in America to-day, let us not be first moved to acquiescence by the profound art, the human daring, and the honorable achievement of the great Norwegian, but let us first ask ourselves, What is his message? Is it for us? And is it for all of us as a people? And if it be for us, if it be indeed pertinent and inspiring to the vision of our vast young democracy, let us ordain him master, and rally for him disciples, and appropriate the principles of his technique, that his message may live on in America. But if it is *not* for us, if it is pertinent only to the different conditions and needs which gave it utterance in his mind and art, let us *not* ordain him master, but honoring in him the dauntless Norwegian and the sincere artist, imitate only his daring and his sincerity, and go the way of our own vision, repudiating his domination as he himself repudiated the domination of Shakspere

and all the Lilliputian disciples of that giant.

What, then, is the message of Ibsen? Is it not the suffering of human pathology — the courage to meet the subtler diseases of society, the stoicism to diagnose the incurable ills of inheritance? Thus at its best his function as dramatist becomes that of the informed physician and surgeon, and the sad world his clinic. And so, with diverse mood and accent, reads the philosophy of his European followers. Theirs is the message, wrung from serious hearts, of a corroded society; their own society, its need of health, its erotic and neurasthenic pangs. Theirs is the message of overpopulation, and all the pessimism of that.

Is such the predestined message of our American democracy? Is such the timely and peculiar appeal of a drama which shall awaken the authentic response of a people of eighty millions — a people to whom the wilderness is still, thank God, an inspiration; for whom even in their slums the hill-ranging

winds are still hope, and the sweat of their labor still pledge of a wholesome futurity? Is such a message indeed for us? Or can any technical mastery make it ours?

But the art of these Europeans is also something other and less than the cry of a degenerate race. For it is not the cry of a race at all, nor of a people, but of a segment of society. Significant is this distinction. Not Norway, nor the peoples of Europe, cry out through Ibsen and his followers; not those peoples, whose great masses are still peasant, full-blooded, inarticulate as in the feudal age; but the sophisticated strata of their so-called upper society, the modern corroding remains of an aristocratical system now mingled with *bourgeoisie*. Those strata are Ibsen's humanity; their anæmia the solicitude of his art. It is not, however, simply the pathology of Ibsen's message, but also its restricted public, which characterizes it. This arises out of the nature of the theatre in Europe as an established institution of those classes — its nature as the conservator and home of

what may be called *the segregated drama.* By the segregated drama I mean the drama considered as *a fine art for the few;* that drama which, having its secure home in the court and municipal theatres of Europe, has produced the noblest examples of modern dramaturgy.

As the popular alternatives to the segregated drama in Europe exist the cockpits, the bull-fights, and the *cafés chantants.*

In America, a similar distinction has not been, until lately, definitely marked. But with the growth of organization in the theatre as a business it has become yearly more apparent that the chaotic stuff of our dramatic world is revolving itself into two utterly sundered spheres: —

First: The Segregated Drama, based on European ideals.

Second: Vaudeville, a *mélange* of amusements, variously adapted from the drama, the *cafés chantants,* and the cockpits.

In the first, the drama is considered as a fine art for the few. In the second, the drama

is considered not as a fine art at all, but as a heterogeneous entertainment for the many.

Here now is a crucial moment, an inspiring opportunity, in our dramatic history, and hence in our history as a nation. For neither the one nor the other sphere represents, I believe, the destiny of American drama. Between those two ideals and distinct from each, exists, potential, a third ideal — an ideal correspondent to the essential genius and the native opportunity of our American nation and its dramaturgy. That third ideal is the Drama of Democracy — the drama as *a fine art for the many.*

A momentous ideal; a momentous opportunity. With temperance it may be said, that not since the age of Pericles has there existed a communal field for art comparable in possibility to our own, and ours is a field richer and vaster in promise, as America to-day is, by science and inter-communication, bound the more closely to the whole world than was ancient Greece.

The drama as a fine art *for the many;* and

by "the many" I mean "the whole people," both *virtuosi* and *hoi polloi*. Æschylus, Sophocles, Aristophanes, and their contemporary peers, consummate artists, interpreted an eager people to themselves, created for and by their own works a whole nation of dramatic critics, and infused generations of shepherds, bankers, and street gamins with a judicious enthusiasm for the fine art of dramatic poetry.

It is related that, during the enactment of a play by Aristophanes, one of the actors misplaced the metrical accent of his verse in the dialogue; whereupon the whole audience of thousands rose, as one man, in their seats and hissed their critical rebuke.

Moreover, by observation at first hand, by a fresh and native insight, those Greek dramatists created their own ideals out of the national consciousness of their fellow-Athenians. Compare with this Catullus, Horace, and the Augustan Roman poets, who borrowed their criteria, ready formed, from the Greeks, and sought to foist them upon their anti-

pathetic countrymen. With the segregated few they succeeded, but not with the many. The *profanum vulgus* went its way to the beast-fights and the gladiators. The Coliseum is the monument of a people without a popular fine art; the theatre of Dionysus at Athens a monument to the Drama of Democracy.

Now, while too close an analogy may not, of course, be drawn, yet one parallel is pertinent. Our creative dramatists, our intelligent public opinion, are guided and enthused by European ideals, which, however admirable to their germane conditions, here, when transplanted to us, are at best a delight to those restricted few whom they thus educate, while at worst, their advocacy by that few permits of one mighty danger to our many; namely, that *by importing a fine art which does not, of its nature, appeal to our masses, our masses shall remain without a fine art, and so retrograde;* that by the neglect of the enlightened few to provide our whole people with modern national Theatres of Dionysus, the Coliseums of the variety shows shall be increasingly

provided for them by the unenlightened astuteness of private enterprise.

This very condition threatens us now, when our people as a people, untouched by the art or message of an Ibsen and Maeterlinck (subtle and noble though these be), turns gropingly, and increasingly satisfied, to the ubiquitous Vaudeville Show which a splendidly organized business system provides for them, ignorant or uncaring of the consequences to our civic life. Let us remember that theatre-goers in America are numbered by the millions and tens of millions, when we ask ourselves: What *are* those consequences to us, and to the generations, in our national development?

An analysis of the nature of Vaudeville [1] and its effect upon the masses will, I think, reveal at least these four elements vitiating to the American native capacity for a true drama of democracy: —

First, its intermittent appeal, whereby the Variety Show is destructive of all sustained concentration on the part of its audience,

[1] See Comment on page 195.

numbing its sense of logical coherence, æsthetic unity, and the constructive harmonies of dramatic action.

Thus, for example, an audience of business men who, in the daytime, whet and educate their inherent capacity for art by analyzing and harmonizing the constructive laws of commerce, and the upbuilding of industry, — men, who by day follow their joy and ambition in the inexorable detection of the sequence of cause and effect, — these same men will permit themselves, after dark, to sit like so many aborigines of Patagonia, and applaud with vacuous admiration the sequence of a show as logically coherent as shoes and sealing-wax.

Compare with this form of amusement a comedy of Aristophanes, with its sustained orchestration of wit and its gamut of lyric fun — a true fine art for the masses.

Secondly, its necessary appeal to average taste and minimum critical faculty. *Necessary* it is, because Vaudeville as a business cannot afford to take risks, and, as a business, cannot afford to be educative of criticism.

The broadest basis of appeal, with least financial risk,[1] is its corner-stone. Now average taste, of course, is bad taste, and since bad taste *in factu* is more dependable than good taste *in posse*, the policy of Vaudeville becomes the progressive cultivation in the public of average or bad taste, and the gradual paralysis of the people's critical faculty.

Thirdly, its pseudo-morality. With knowing regard for the prejudices of conventional ethics, the wares of its Variety are advertised as alike innocent for sucklings and sinners; whereas, in actual performance, the equivocal hint and the nameless innuendo, by consciously avoiding a legal indecency, are doubly corrupt by their hypocrisy.

Fourth, its dementedness. This characteristic has already been alluded to, but deserves to be emphasized as a distinct element. To one who enters the average Vaudeville house with the poise of a sane mind, the unwholesome hysteria of the performance is pitifully manifest. The unmeaning haste, the ex-

[1] See Comment on page 197.

aggerated feat of skill, the baseless mirth, the overtaxed fatigue, are evidences not of spontaneous and wholesome revelry, but of neurasthenia.

All these vitiating elements of Vaudeville are of course glossed, and in part atoned, by frequent exhibits of sound powers, flashes of consummate wit, splendid inventions of science, brief revelations of genius; yet *as a substitute for a true drama of democracy*, its results are perilous to our generations. For its results are these: that it substitutes forgetfulness of civic life for consciousness of civic life; individual entertainment for communal self-expression; sensual callousness for sensuous enkindlement; and popular "money-tricks" for the supreme fine art of humanity.

On the other hand, we have the contrasted works and public of the segregated drama, which looks to modern European dramaturgy for its inspiration and technique. There exists also amidst us, to be sure, a more or less popular drama, with no special ideal save that of supplying the histrionic wants of stars,

or the commercial needs of managers, and this largely fills the theatres in the "legitimate" business; but as this has no other basic motive or message, it is necessarily ephemeral and, to our present discussion, negligible.

The segregated drama, however, is of great importance. It has a definite and — within narrowed bounds — a lofty ideal. With increasing revulsion against the banality of the Variety Shows, the very aim of its being is differentiation from the ideals of the masses. It is a fine art for the few. In Europe, indubitably, the salvation of the drama has lain in segregation; thereby it has maintained its high level of achievement. From Racine to Rostand, from Lessing to Hauptmann, the segregated theatres of France and Germany have produced a succession of excelling poet-artists.

Reasoning from this analogy, the intelligent in America have set their hopes in a like segregation, to this end appropriating those European masters and their art. In this expectation, they neglect two important con-

siderations: First, that the success of that art is based upon the original incentives of those masters, and not upon any qualities of that art which may be imitated. Secondly, that even if successfully imported, that foreign art, with its segregative ideals, can never hope to fill the unique opportunity of a drama which shall satisfy the native need and capacity of the American people for self-development in fine art. Alluring, then, — even tempting, — as the segregative ideal may be to the few, permanent and productive as its function will always be in human society, it is, nevertheless, I believe, not for us the destined ideal, not for us the appropriate goal of the drama of our American democracy.

That a fine art for the many is a practical ideal has been proved by its realization in at least two historical eras. The dramatic works of Marlowe, Shakspere, Webster, and their inspired contemporaries at once created, and were created by, audiences with receptivity to the large imagination and the sonorous utterance of those Elizabethans. In more com-

plete measure, as they were the product of more democratical conditions, the works of the great Greek dramatists brought into being a popular fine art, which has been the admiration and the envy of the segregated artists in all ages.

In our own time, in the cognate field of music, we have beheld the analogous birth and growth of an universal fine art, through the vision and will of a single artist. Less than fifty years ago, the Wagnerian opera had neither theatres, audiences, nor interpreters; its technique was scoffed at; its practicality was denied, its possibilities of popular appeal were ignored or ridiculed. We know what it is to-day. But what Wagner accomplished for the drama of song and musical motif may equally be accomplished for the drama of speech and the motif of verse, and with far deeper effect upon the self-development of our whole people, inasmuch as the spoken drama may enter, not as a beautiful thing apart, but as a forming influence, a critical and self-revealing inspiration, into the very sources of our national life.

To compare the scope and relative appeal of the segregated with the democratical ideal in fine art, compare the Don Giovanni of Mozart with the Siegfried of Wagner. Compare the delineation of that distracted soul, Halvard Solness, the Master Builder, with the delineation of Macbeth; the character drawing of Oscar Wilde's Lord Windermere, with that of Falstaff; the Peleas and Melisande of Maeterlinck with the Orestes and Electra of Sophocles. Here are the master drawings of masters — but masters in two distinct methods and aims. The distinction, in art, is one between individualism and universalism, between naturalism and idealism. Ibsen, Oscar Wilde, Maeterlinck depict individuals, and types of a segment of society; Shakspere and Sophocles images of all humanity.

But is, then, this distinction a dead issue? Does modernity necessarily imply individualism and naturalism? Are the dramatic poets of to-day and to-morrow never more to carry on and upward the tradition and the message of an universal vision? And is

poetry for the masses, as some of our modern prophets have chanted, indeed as dead as the door-nail of the proverb? Patience! Many such door-nails rivet the coffin of scepticism. There is the horizon of a theatrical season and there is the horizon of the centuries. And from the latter serene horizon looms the unharvested ideal of a new drama for our democracy.

A *new* drama, for though of necessity its main roots will strike for nutriment deep into English tradition and language, and permeate the subsoil of the centuries as far as the age of Pericles, yet trunk and branch shall spread themselves over the nation as indigenous and beneficent as our American elms.

A drama, it must be, adapted to a people of many millions: many millions, but fused by the American Spirit — one nation; their prairies, their mountains, their vast river valleys, as well as the infinite meanings of their cities, it shall humanly interpret and make vocal to them and their posterity. Its dramatists, peering through imagination into the past,

the present, the future, shall strive (as Keats says) "to see as a god sees," and make those images their Dramatis Personæ. And especially when they look into the past, they shall see with their own eyes, in no archaic spirit, but to reveal its perennial meanings to their modern time. Thus they will create characters, corresponding in sculpture to the ideal groups of a Phidias as opposed to the goldsmith portraiture of a Cellini. These they will delineate with large simplicity and passion, as befits a fine art for the many. No longer Mr. and Mrs. Brown, Smith, Robinson, with all their idiosyncrasies superfluous to a national art, shall walk the boards, but, instead, living symbols of our living world, so re-created in imagination as to move and breathe like visible gods and demi-gods of our modernity; beings as simply understandable to our American masses as the Greek-stage Zeus and Agamemnon were to the Athenians; characters as familiar to the modern man in the audience as the great forces of labor and capital, competition and graft and reform, of which he

reads in his newspaper — now tangibly set before him as distinct and breathing images, which shall ever after serve to interpret for him — himself and the life of his nation. "Symbols," I have said, yet the dramatic poet of democracy will not, I think, allegorize; neither will he so much symbolize, as see and create *in the large.*

Dramatic poet he must be, for in the very nature of its ideal the drama of democracy will be a poetic drama. Not a revival of old forms, not an emulation of Elizabethan blank verse, but a fresh imagining and an original utterance of modern motives which are as yet unimagined and unexpressed. Not a revival, but a new birth; not a restoration, but a renascence of poetic drama. No bounds can be set prophetically to the particular forms of its expression: those will be determined by its dramatists. There are those to-day who see no futurity for dramatic art save in prose; yet such are, I think, enamoured of a naturalistic ideal. For myself, varied and fascinating as I find the gamut of prose, yet in the

largeness and the deep passion of our opportunity I can see no form of utterance so appropriate to that world-drama of America as those natural cadences of emotion in speech which are allied to music. A fresh study of the laws of those cadences, as adaptable to the purposes of modern poetic drama and its popular appeal, will result, I believe, in a new harmonious complexity of form in verse and rhythm.

But whether expressed in prose or verse, the message of the drama of our democracy is equally important with its form. That message will be the message not of an Old World *ennui*, the fruit of overpopulation; but of a New World optimism, based in the heritage of the land itself.

On the boards of its theatre the spirit of Comedy shall be master, and shift with twinkling eyes his tragic masks. There not merely the sad aspiring of a race shall speak in beauty; huge Satire and the vast guffaw of Folly will chant harmonious; shrill Wit, twanging a lightning bow of verse, shall rattle his barbs

of melodious mockery; and Reason, standing in the wings, will smile his sweet, serene smile philosophical. Thus shall that Comic Spirit, which is twin of the American Spirit, be lifted to the large plane of fine art, and illuminating the average American to himself raise thereby his mirth to a finer dignity.

With the new drama of Democracy, then, will arise a divergent dramatic technique, a native appeal and message, a new and nobler art of impersonation,[1] and — above all — to administer and develop its vast function, a new theatrical institution, with basic liberty and permanent security for its growth.

Manifestly, all these things are not as yet; the drama as a popular fine art does not exist; existing conditions cannot foster it; actors of to-day are not schooled to interpret it; the modern public does not demand it. These are the easy comments of the observer of things as they are. To whom the observer of things as they may well be, shall reply: *Of course* the drama as a popular fine art does

[1] See Comment on page 198.

not exist; *of course* existing conditions cannot foster it; *of course* actors are not schooled to it; *of course* the public does not demand it. Since, however, we have clearly beheld the vision of such a drama, and seen that it is beautiful, and since all those things which are not yet are necessary for the embodiment of that vision, *of course, therefore, we will create them,* and those things shall be.

Patience, once more. A day — a decade — is not destiny. Why, in our drama, — without moving our little fingers either for investigation or for remedy, — why do we expect that reform and rectitude of conditions which, in banking and insurance and our legislatures, we strive for strenuously in vain? If I have proffered to you here a *credo* instead of an accomplishment, it is because it has seemed worth while to communicate a faith, which only time and collaboration of desire can fully substantiate.

We must take time, — but first we must take action. In the path of the prediction I have made, obstacles are intrenched, seem-

ingly insuperable. Beyond them rises, splendid, the drama of democracy. Let us be swift to face those obstacles, wise to analyze them, patient to resist them, ruthless to remove them. And when we have triumphed, strong, then, and inspired let us be to build beyond them.

In the gladness of these hopes, these determinations, it is pleasant to recur to the thoughts of that quiet seer, whom at first I quoted, and to feel, through divers times and responsibilities, *the continuity of an American ideal.* Himself, serene in his New England orchard, the least dramatic of poets, to whom in his time the world of the theatre was a realm uncharted as the seacoast of Bohemia, yet are his words to-day a blazonry and a call to the drama of our democracy. "Brothers and friends," not only in the technique of our dramatic art, but also in the pioneer work of upbuilding its institution, henceforth "we will walk on our own feet, we will work with our own hands, *we will speak our own minds.*"

THE DRAMATIST AS CITIZEN

THE DRAMATIST AS CITIZEN

IN a literal sense, a citizen is one who owes allegiance to his government and, reciprocally, is entitled to protection from it. In our own county, such allegiance comprises the duty and right of the male citizen to vote at the polls, to fight — if called upon — in war, and of all citizens to pay taxes as legally assessed, and to obey the statutes.

In that restrictive sense, the government of the United States accords citizenship to many millions.

But in a larger sense, a citizen is one who owes to his fellow-countrymen all public service of his special capacity and, reciprocally, is entitled to opportunity from public opinion to perform such service. That special capacity will chiefly depend on his vocation in the community.

In this larger sense, public opinion in the United States recognizes men and women of

special capacity in numerous vocations as "leading citizens," or "public servants."

Traditionally, certain vocations are more widely looked to than others as sources of public service. Such, for example, are the vocations of the statesman, the minister, the physician. To take rank in these callings it is necessary for a man to succeed not merely in the labors of self-seeking, but of altruism. Of the statesman, or the minister, or the physician, it is demanded — at the risk of public stigma — that he shall serve the good of society. This demand is just, for it is proportioned to the public influence, for good or for evil, inherent in the nature of his profession. By the nature of their vocations the physician and the minister hold within their influence the physical and moral health of communities; the statesman sways the life and destiny of a nation. Therefore society has safeguarded those vocations themselves by establishing certain tests and standards of fitness for their incumbents. At the same time, society has provided opportunity for

aspirants to those vocations to fit themselves for meeting those tests and standards.

Thus, for example, as the diploma and state license safeguard the practice of medicine, so do medical schools give opportunity for meeting the tests and standards set by the diploma and license.

Now the specific standards set for the practice of medicine result from the general attitude of public opinion toward the profession of the physician. And so it is with all professions. In the last analysis, *professional standards originate in public opinion.*

Considering, therefore, the extraordinary public influence, for good or for evil, inherent in the dramatist's profession, is it not pertinent — is it not timely — to inquire into the attitude of public opinion toward the drama, with a view to ascertaining what standards of responsibility and efficiency, if any, determine the dramatist's practice of his profession?

First, then, how far does public opinion realize the extraordinary public influence, for

good or for evil, of the dramatist's profession? Secondly, how far is public opinion ready to accord to the dramatist's profession equal opportunities with other professions of leadership?

Thoroughgoing answers to these questions would account, I think, for the status and standards of the dramatist's profession in our country to-day. In the present paper, I can but suggest a few paths of thought which I hope may lead others far better qualified than I to detect and marshal the significances of a subject among the most neglected and important of our time.

"Neglected" — a neglected subject? Have I not made a questionable assertion? Is there a single other subject which consumes as much wood-pulp per annum in the columns of our newspapers as the subject of the theatre? Is there a single other denizen of the side-fences — not excepting *Sapolio* — as ubiquitous as the play-poster? Into the Pullman windows of the Sunset Limited, it cries aloud from the wilderness. Even the indigent ash-

barrel shares its fame. Wherever two and two are gathered together, the topic of the theatre is the very ointment and Omega Oil of conversation. Is, then, the subject of the drama neglected?

In one sense, no; decidedly, no. The drama, as a social and commercial fact, is everywhere superficially discussed. But the meaning of the drama as a contemporaneous civic force is rarely imagined or considered. Plays and players, as wares of the theatre, are wonderfully advertised; but the theatre itself, as perhaps the mightiest potentiality for civic enlightenment and education in America, is almost nowhere studied and criticised with a view to its higher status as an institution. Its *actual* status is simply accepted as inevitable, and all discussions of the problems and progress of the drama are directed toward what the drama can do *under the circumstances*. There is no concerted rational plan to *change the circumstances themselves* for the better.

Consequently, from decade to decade, this

or that player, or dramatist, or theatrical producer, according to his special efforts, is the object of praise or blame from public opinion, while the basic commercial conditions of the institution, which has brought player and dramatist and theatrical producer into being, are simply ignored. Under these circumstances, of course, progress in the drama is limited to the basic conditions of the theatre as an institution of private speculative business.

Now an institution of speculative business is not the same thing as an institution of civic enlightenment. That platitude has been rammed home for American citizens to their cost, in cases of more than one great business enterprise gone awry; as witness the insurance investigations. That same platitude is being ignored by American citizens in the case of the theatre, but with this important difference: intelligent investigation of the insurance companies revealed pernicious conditions which touched only the vest pockets of the people. Intelligent investigation of the theatres will reveal pernicious conditions which strike deeper

— into the very hearts and minds and souls of the people.

Again, have I made a questionable assertion? Or am I, contrary to your probable opinion of me, about to wield the proverbial muck-rake in a new barnyard? Neither, I assure you. Do I, then, mean that the controllers of the theatres in America are shamefully abusing a public trust? Not at all. They have received no public trust. They have no such thing to abuse. Do I allude, then, to militant business combinations in the theatre? — to syndicates and anti-syndicates? No, still less, for these are of very little importance to our subject. Still, I have alluded to "pernicious conditions" in the theatre: to what conditions, then, do I refer?

In Lewis Carroll's "Through the Looking Glass," Alice desires to reach a particular viewpoint on a distant hill. But every time she attempts to make toward it, she walks instead into her own doorway. Therefore, explains the author, "she thought she would try the plan of walking in the opposite direc-

tion. It succeeded beautifully. She had not been walking a minute before she found herself full in sight of the hill she had been so long aiming at." To reach *my* particular viewpoint, I also will resort to this *Looking-glass* method, in hopes of reaching — by a process of reversal — the desirable hilltop, with a bird's-eye view of my meaning.

Ladies and gentlemen, friends and citizens, it gives me deep concern — but it is needful in the interest of truth and the subject in hand — to read to you the following extracts, all of which I have sedulously copied from To-morrow Evening's *Comet*: —

SUDDEN CATACLYSM IN THE WORLDS OF SCHOLARSHIP AND ART

Latest News from the Colleges

The Universities of Harvard, Yale, Columbia, and Princeton [and it is also rumored, all other American Universities besides] have simultaneously undergone an internal revolution. They have suddenly become deprived of all endowment. In each case, the overseers have resigned. The Corporation has deposed the

President, reorganized as a joint stock company, and appointed the College Bursar, who owns the majority of the stock, as General Manager of the newly formed "University Variety and Amusement Company," by which livelier title the students now hail their ancient *Alma Mater*. Owing to the revolution in the treasury, most of the professors and their assistants have been dismissed. The more progressive individualists, however, have been retained, to collaborate with the Glee Club and the Varsity Eleven in devising a general elective course of such needful popularity and diversion as shall assure to the students their "money's worth," prevent the ancestral halls from being deserted, and keep the Company's stock above par. It is reported that the combined efforts of the Varsity quarter-back, the Glee Club tenor, and the Professor of Hellenic Gymnastics have already been rewarded with unexampled ovations.

News from the Public Schools

It was to-day decided, by vote of the Municipal Boards of Education in all American cities, and ratified by the Mayors thereof, to withdraw all municipal funds for the maintenance of the Public School System. This progressive decision was reached after five minutes'

conference with a notable body of philosophers, who conclusively proved that *Competition is a law of nature*, and *therefore* all institutions which tend artificially to check its *natural* course in human communities should be abolished. Since municipal endowment undoubtedly constitutes such an artificial check, henceforth the Public Schools of America will be conducted on *pure business principles*, embodying the *natural law* of commercial competition. Since, moreover, statistics show that school children in America number several millions of souls, the School Boards are promised a pretty rake-off by the philosophers.

Latest News from the Art Museums

The Metropolitan Museum of New York, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Chicago Art Museum [and likewise, it is rumored, all other endowed institutions of art in America], having unanimously decided that art and artists should be dealt with "democratically," have henceforth determined to refuse all patronage from wealthy citizens and so-called "lovers of art," and to make their only appeal direct to the taste and standards of the people. This decision was reached after conferring with the same ubiquitous body of philosophers, who succeeded in inculcating their following favorite

maxims: "Let art stand on its own legs," and "The people know what they want anyway."

The latest paintings hung, under the new unendowed *régime*, are said to present a noteworthy contrast to the works of Da Vinci, Velasquez, Turner, Corot, Innes, Fuller, Winslow Homer, and their ilk.

Latest Items: Miscellaneous

1. A box-office was installed to-day in the Astor Library, New York.

2. The parishioners of Trinity Church, Boston, have voted to pay no more money for the support of regular services. Instead, the parish has reorganized as a corporate enterprise, admission will be charged at the church doors, and laymen will compete in the pulpit for a share in the gross receipts.

3. Mr. Andrew Carnegie, realizing that the Carnegie Institute at Washington conduces only to the advancement of pure science and human happiness, but not to dividends, has withdrawn his support permanently from that institution.

Such are some of the more significant tidings derived from that inspired source, To-morrow's *Comet*. From still another column of that same newspaper I have copied one longer

excerpt, which is perhaps even as revolutionary in character as the preceding items. It reads as follows: —

THEATRICAL PROSPECT AND RETROSPECT

Reviewing the present theatrical situation, it seems but yesterday that we in America were walking in mediæval darkness and superstition. Let us, for a moment, briefly set forth the status of the theatre in our country to-day, that we may compare it, in recollection, with its status of yesterday.

In the first place, to-day, in every important city of the land, there is erected, at a convenient central point in the community, an ample and beautiful building, capable of seating an appropriate proportion of the population. This building, by the simple grandeur of its architecture, is seen at first glance to be the permanent home of a vital civic institution: an institution vital not merely to changing seasons of a cult of play-goers, but to the continuous generations of citizens. This is immediately evident to the casual observer by the fact that the only other public buildings comparable to it, in solemnity and permanence of design, are the Court House and the City Hall [or Capitol], with which it is architecturally grouped.

This municipal building is the Theatre: not Jones's theatre, nor Rosenbaum's, nor Robinson's, but *the* Theatre: *the* house of the conscious life of a free community. Here, foremost, are focussed the highest efforts of all artists. Here, in visible symbol for the thronging people, the sculptor has recorded in stone and bronze the noblest traditions of the people's life: their civic leaders, among whom are seen, harmonious, their statesmen, their artists, their soldiers, their scientific inventors and philosophers — the liberators of men, gazing on whose perennial forms the meanest of the crowd at their pedestals may hope one day so to be beautifully recorded. Here the artist painter, collaborating with the dramatist in a new technique, devotes his craftsmanship to the creation of new stage-settings, upbuilding fresh traditions in his art by permanent masterpieces, beside which the bric-à-brac wings and drops of yesterday show like the ephemeral makeshifts of children; here, too, he competes with his fellow-artists for the honor of executing the permanent frescos which add a lighter loveliness to the solemn spans of the auditorium. Here the musical composer correlates his special art with that of the painter, and subordinates it to the objects of dramaturgy. Here the dramatist, the focal artist of this focal art of the community, com-

petes with his fellow-dramatists in executing, for the selective approval of his peers, dramas which shall most splendidly express, by passion, imagination, beauty, and delight, the vital significances of the people's history, — past, present, and prophetic.

Here the actor, disciplined in the old and new traditions of the play, chosen by competition with his fellow-actors, by standards of native insight, experience, adaptability, excellence in movement, pantomime, gesture, eloquence, speech, embodies the passion, imagination, beauty, and delight of the dramatist's conceptions.

Here other technicians, in arts which yesterday were latent or unconceived, — the masker, the tapicer, the leader of pantomime and dance, the master of lights and disappearances, — ply their expert crafts, like practised members of an orchestra, under the viewless *baton* of the theatrical director.

Here, most of all, — the object and the instigator of these combined efforts of artists, — the *audience* holds its civic ritual.

Is it not strange that, for more than two thousand years, the communal desire of occidental peoples should have dispersed itself in factions, and found no single harmonizing instrument to express itself, until — in the evolution of the American democracy — the theatre

once more, as in ancient Greece, expressed the oneness in will and character of a nation?

Yet it is not strange, for, during at least a thousand of those years, one vital half of human nature and of national life, the religious instinct, expressed itself through the great organ of the church, while the civic half split and raged in many factions. But at last in America, in the twentieth century, when the church itself had become moribund, split by many sects and schisms, and essentially unadapted to express the unity and variety of national consciousness, and while the national consciousness of the democracy itself was becoming enlarged and uplifted by an unprecedented impulse of civic pride and regeneration, the true potentialities of the theatre, long dormant, were realized by the leaders of public opinion.

These leaders then perceived that in the nature of the drama itself there lay ready to their hands a form and type of expression adapted to harmonize religious impulse with civic growth; to give to national progress vital and visible symbols. But these leaders also perceived that this potentiality of the drama could never be realized until the theatre — the drama's communal instrument — should be *dedicated to public, not private, ends*. This light was slow to break upon the minds

of those leaders. When, at last, however, its full meaning dawned, then — almost as with the passing of night — there was commenced, quietly, unostentatiously, inevitably, that reformation in the status of the playhouse which has converted our theatres into cathedrals of communal delight, and our dramas into rituals of civic aspiration.

Now in reality the theatres belong to the people. In some instances, wealthy citizens of the commonwealth have presented to the city the building, with a maintenance fund in perpetuity, and so perpetuated their own fame, like that Rufus Holconius of Pompeii, whose gift of a theatre to his city has conserved his name in the ashes of two thousand years. In other instances, the churches have coöperated with civic organizations to put the institution of the theatre upon a basis more nearly corresponding to that of the Athenian theatre of Pericles than that of any other prototype. In still other instances, the municipality itself, through channels analogous to those of the public school system, has authorized the expenditure of public funds for the building and perpetual endowment of its theatre. In other cases, the State has coöperated with the universities toward this end. In still other cases, significant organizations of leading

citiz ns, such as the National Institute of Arts and Letters, have stood sponsors for raising and establishing the needful foundation fund. In a single instance, the Federal Government itself has established a theatre of national primacy at Washington. In all cases, the public theatres — being established for the civic welfare of their communities — have been safeguarded by reliable and perennial trusteeships.

Therefore the theatre buildings are as much the home of the people as the public libraries, and their rules and privileges are as consistently respected.

For occasions of dramatic performances (which usually occur four or five nights in the week), seats are provided, sometimes *gratis*, sometimes for a nominal sum, through a special office, whose function is the equitable distribution of seats.

On all other occasions the building is available for public purposes. It is a public institution not merely by night, but by day. For here, also, the once perfunctory and commonplace incidents of civic routine take on their appropriate significance and solemnity.

Here the newly arrived immigrants from over seas, with minds and hearts alert for the message and meaning of the republic, are officially convened from the gang-planks and given, through interpreters, a specific

vista of hope and sympathy in their new land, before being submerged in its millions. Here the special ordination of citizenship is performed, with fit and moving ceremony. Here the foreign guest of state is received and greeted. Here the outgoing regiments assemble to pray before marching to the wars; here they reassemble to commemorate their dead. Here the modern guilds and unions, touched once more by the spirit of public art as in the Middle Age, devise symbolic pageantries and processions, whose festive influences interpenetrate the life of the streets and the market-places, giving appropriate form and voice to that American passion for festival which formerly found its chief vent in the marching cohorts of Saint Patrick and the tooting horns of election night. Being the house of life in its fulness, here also in the playhouse the nation's dead heroes lie in state, for without the meaning of death, life has no fulness.

Strange again that these potentialities of the theatre once brought smiles of scepticism to the lips of experts — experts who were accustomed to read in their newspapers of a thousand buried cities unearthed from the dust of Roman and Greek dominions; and always, in the centre of each ancient city, like the pupil within the iris of a Cyclops' eye, the civic theatre of a vanished

people. Yet those experts took from that fact no forethought, unless to recommend the excavation of more ruined cities. 'Besides (they would say), even though we may grant the artistic preëminence of Athens, — a single commonwealth, — yet that preëminence was based in class-servitude; whereas our nation — a vast union of commonwealths — is based in a nobler ideal of human freedom. Moreover, Rome was an empire, and we are a democracy. Her ancient theatres were monuments to imperial or tyrannical pride. What analogy can they bear for us?' So they would reason. And still it never occurred to them that we in America might emulate the wisdom of the ancients without imitating their follies.

Nevertheless, we made the experiment, and it is open to all to compare the American theatre of to-day with that of yesterday.

How, then, has the experiment affected the professions of the actor and the dramatist?

The actor, rising now in his profession by native genius and technical proficiency, not by mere personality and business acumen, is no longer the victim of exaggerated advertisement, with no margin of leisure, corresponding to that of other citizens, in which to measure himself with his fellow-artists and

with general society. He is no longer obliged, by the conditions of his profession, to live the homeless life of a travelling Bohemian. Instead, acting only for a few nights in each week in a permanent company of artists, associated as a peer with the leaders of his community, he may both study his own art and engage in normal human relations, perfecting himself at once as an artist and as a member of the community.

The dramatist, too, now rises according to native and technical efficiency. Being secure of an appropriate salary, according to his gifts as a craftsman, he needs no longer seek vainly to reconcile the objects of his profession with those of a speculative business. When he seeks to interpret nature and human society, it is with a view to truth, not expediency. When he seeks to embody a dramatic theme, it is to achieve *dramatic excellence, not theatrical average;* otherwise his work will not meet the standards of the professional masters, who choose it for production. *With the new status of the playhouse, the incentives of the gambler have been taken from the dramatist; but the incentives of the artist have been added unto him a hundred fold.* A thousand avenues of imagination are now open to him, which were not open before to the mind, which must of necessity calculate beforehand the *risk* of

fortunes to middlemen involved in exploring untrodden paths. Now the people, and his message to the people, are his only concern. A new freedom and a new responsibility have transformed his profession. Henceforth, and for the first time, he is — in the larger meaning of citizenship — a citizen.

Thus endeth the tale clipped from to-morrow evening's *Comet*. (The tails of comets are proverbially nebulous.) I wonder whether to-morrow's newspaper, like to-morrow, never comes!

But now, having by these meteoric methods alighted on our *Looking-glass* hill, we may sit down and look back upon the two questions which sent us forth.

First: How far does public opinion realize the extraordinary public influence, for good or for evil, of the dramatist's profession?

I think the answer has been suggested. Either public opinion realizes little or nothing of that vast influence, or public opinion is inexcusably remiss in failing to direct that influence into the channels of civic welfare.

Of this alternative, we must certainly assume the former to be true. Public opinion does not realize the vast scope and significance of the dramatist's profession as a civic influence. Therefore, it has become one of the important responsibilities of the dramatist as citizen to help enlighten public opinion with regard to the fitting status of his profession. And this leads to our second question: —

How far is public opinion ready to accord to the dramatist's profession equal opportunities with other professions of leadership?

The answer to this, citizens, lies with you. You, and other intelligent bodies like you, are the crucibles of public opinion, in which maleficent elements may be recombined for beneficent ends. *The commercial experts of the theatre are right when they say that the theatre, as an institution, is what you make it.* They are not concerned by self-interest, however, to inform you that, *if you will take the trouble*, you can make it a very different and a better institution. For obvious and sensible reasons, the com-

mercial experts themselves will not take the trouble. If you expect that, you will wait forever and deserve to wait. In fact, you *have* been waiting, and doing little else. That is the deadlock in the drama's progress. But if you will take the trouble to analyze theatrical conditions dispassionately, you will see that the first step necessary to permanently establish the dramatic profession on a basis of civic dignity and usefulness is *to change the logical incentives* of the profession: to change its prime incentive from one of private speculation for personal profit to one of public service for the highest reward of citizenship — the honor of wise men.

Public opinion has accorded this wiser incentive to other professions, — to the profession of the doctor, the minister, the college president, and professor. Why does public opinion withhold it from the profession of the dramatist?

Perhaps because the dramatist's profession is itself a factor in creating public opinion opposed to its own higher interests. For

its own survival, it must needs exemplify attributes which conduce to a low opinion of its nature. If this is the whole reason, then public opinion regarding the drama may be described as in a state analogous to that of forlorn communities, where malpractice in medicine is condoned, because the practitioners find in that their largest means of livelihood. This, however, is not a sufficient reason. Public opinion is lethargic, not corrupt. It may be drugged by the doses it frequently receives from the profession; but it is not permanently perverted. To believe so would be to impugn the wholesome spirit of our nation itself, and this is supported by no sane evidence.

A more fundamental reason for the lethargy of public opinion toward the drama is that this is an inherited tendency of Anglo-Saxon communities. In England itself there seems little hope of the people's ever taking an enlightened view of the theatre's civic functions. In America, however, where fortunately Anglo-Saxon tradition toward public art is being

constantly leavened for the better by instincts and traditions inherited from other peoples and lands — in America, the flood tide of a noble renascence is already stirring in the deeps of the democracy, and it is this assurance which gives hope and pertinence to an appeal for public opinion to revolutionize its traditional view of the playhouse as a place ordained for the wise to seek foolish gratification, and the foolish — to remain as they are.

There is yet a third potent reason which is embodied in the old adage, "What is everybody's business, is nobody's business."

Everywhere, it is everybody's business to seek enjoyment; in the theatre, it appears to be nobody's business to show them how to do so, to their own best advantage. Yet it is precisely this "nobody's business" which is undertaken, with organized system, by our universities, art schools, medical colleges, churches, clinics, public schools; and for this "nobody's business" hundreds of millions of dollars are donated in our country, by communities and individuals, as a free gift for the

cause of education: the cause of *how to be happy wisely*. Is not this equally the legitimate cause of the theatre? If so, then where is a single million, as a free gift, for the cause of the theatre?

Sixteen years after our forefathers landed on the barren shores of Massachusetts Bay they brought their bushels of wheat, by assessment, to Cambridge, for the endowment of Harvard College. They realized that Learning could not stand on its own legs without a full stomach. They did not require their ministers to compete in the market of commerce. There they were wise; and we inherit that wisdom. Yet they were not sufficiently wise. *They brought no wheat for the sustenance of art*, as once the people of France brought their all, and dragged their very hearthstones, to upbuild the groins and sculptures of their cathedrals. The Puritans still thought it well for one-half of man's nature to starve. There they were foolish; and we, in large measure, inherit that folly. How much longer must the sins of the fathers be upon us?

The drama is splendidly capable of reconciling the best ideals of the Puritan, the Greek, and the Cathedral Builder; of blending in one lay religion the service of the state and the service of God. The drama, I say, is *capable* of doing this, in a theatre free to do so; but the drama is *not able* to do this in a theatre compelled to do otherwise. Let us then seek to reverse the old adage, and henceforth let the "nobody's business" of freeing the theatre from commercial bondage be "everybody's business" who loves the drama and his country.

Those who will gainsay such a purpose — and they will be many and sincere — are chiefly those who do not believe that the drama, the dramatist's profession, holds any such lofty possibilities in its nature. To those I reply: The possibilities of the drama are limited only by the possibilities of man. Search history, search the heart of man, and you will find both precedent and prophecy for the ideal of the drama as the ritual of a lay religion; for the ideal of the theatre as a civic

temple of the people. *And if the precedents of history fail to convince, let it be remembered that the heart of man is itself the maker of precedents.*

I am aware — for reasons which I have given — that this ideal of the drama must at first expect the ridicule and scepticism even of the intelligent. I am aware that the necessary emancipation of the theatre, its institution, may lie far in the future, and meet still with generations of strong opponents. Those opponents, like the opponents of another national emancipation, which had its modest beginnings in our country seventy-five years ago, will ask that the institution of bondage be let alone, and allowed still further to spread down the generations.

Nevertheless, since the fundamental issue of Slavery *versus* Emancipation is as clearly drawn in this case of our nation's art as formerly it was drawn in the case of our nation's life, the same reply may fitly be made to the sincere champions of commercialism in the theatre, as that which Lincoln made to

the champions of serfdom in the republic, — "All they ask we could as readily grant, if we thought slavery right; all we ask they could as readily grant, if they thought it wrong." The issue is clear: Is commercial bondage of a nation's art to be considered *right* or *wrong*?

Yes, without drawing our analogy to the mythical point of bloodshed, we may yet as well begin to realize now, as later it shall be universally realized, that this question of freedom for the theatre is an issue far larger than concerns the theatre alone. It is an issue as comprehensive as the relation of art itself to citizenship.

Is art useful to the state? If so, shall opportunity be accorded for art to perform its highest public service? Shall our artists, *as* artists, be responsible citizens, or time-servers and hangers-on in the democracy? Shall the stigma of *dilettantism* be removed from the vocation of the artist, and the stigma of *showman's wares* from the work of the dramatist? Shall art merely survive by chance and individual emolument, or shall it

be fostered, sustained, and cherished by the organized will of public opinion? On the other hand, shall our average American citizen continue to be stigmatized as a Goth and a Vandal in imagination and taste? Or shall our leading citizens take forethought and action to raise the æsthetic average of citizenship, as they have already taken steps to raise its average in narrower fields of education? Shall America herself, so long taunted by the Old World for her lack of artists, begin to realize *why* she lacks artists, and begin to remove *natural competition* from her fields of culture as assiduously as she removes it from her fields of agriculture? Or shall our crop of artists remain meagre and sporadic from ignorant neglect, while our crops of corn and wheat are ploughed and sown and protected by masterly intelligence?

These are questions, the rational answers to which are planks in the platform of that sane and progressive revolution, which is to-day deeply at work to extirpate all economic servitude from our body politic.

For the one foremost problem of art today is economic, not æsthetic. Since Art is a handing onward through all ages of the Spirit's torches, the study of Old Masters dwindles in importance beside the more vital study of how to enable New Masters to succeed the Old, and sustain that continuity of leadership which is civilization.

Some day there may arise amongst us a supreme critic of American potentialities — a George Brandes and James Bryce in one — who shall detect and marshal the coessentials of art and citizenship with such lucid simplicity that we shall pause aghast to behold ourselves for the blundering barbarians we are.

Such a critic, having for his subject the *Dramatist as Citizen,* will illumine its myriad sides far more adroitly than I have been able to lift obscurity from even one or two of its aspects. In characterizing the dramatist's particular vocation, he will simultaneously reveal the larger issues of his subject. With wisdom and humor and quiet truth, he will

remorselessly convince us that public opinion is devoid of common sense or of conscience if it shall continue to ignore the responsibilities and the *rights* of the artist as citizen.

SELF-EXPRESSION AND THE AMERICAN DRAMA

SELF-EXPRESSION AND THE AMERICAN DRAMA

FROM age to age, and in every peopled land, a vital instinct, imperishable as fire, appears to be reborn; a bodiless principle, peremptory as some vast genius of the elements, seeks embodiment. Under that yearning Spirit's touch, the institutions of men are as clay, the stubborn neck of custom is docile. Stung by his voice, the nations and the communities awaken, grow articulate, freshly comprehend one another and themselves; moved by his imperious smile, they do his bidding wonderingly. That unwithstandable spirit is the Will-to-express.

In our own land to-day that instinct is seeking an old instrument for freshly vital ends; it is seeking the drama to render articulate the American people. In so doing, however, it is only revealing its perennial nature. More than once on our soil that

instinct has asserted itself. Especially about the middle of the last century, in New England, the American genius became eloquent in the forms of literature through the self-expression of men like Hawthorne, Emerson, Whittier, Thoreau, Poe, Whitman, Lowell, Longfellow, Holmes, and the seed of that self-expression has borne hereditary fruit in the works of our American literary artists during the generations since then.

Not until very lately, however, has that same seed — the incentive to self-expression — lodged itself in the heart and mind of the American dramatist. Indeed, so little is such a motive associated by the general public with their conception of the drama's function, so seldom is the dramatist himself considered in the light of an integral artist, that it becomes the somewhat anomalous task of one who would seek self-expression through the drama as a fine art to elucidate and justify his alleged right to so unprecedented a vocation. That a writer of plays should assume the same independent position in art as that

which has long since been yielded by public approbation to the writer of novels or essays or poems, is considered by an astonishing majority of intelligent persons as an untenable assumption.

Why, we may ask, is this so? Why are intelligent persons thus strongly convinced that the dramatist is fundamentally differentiated as an artist from the novelist, the poet, the essayist?

An interesting light, historical and contemporary, is thrown upon this question by a recent interview in the *New York Times* with Mr. Bronson Howard,[1] justly respected as the dean of American dramatists. Referring to the contemporary drama in English, which he classes as "the work of English and American players and authors collectively," Mr. Howard is reported as saying: "All English dramatists are groping in a blind alley. They have stepped aside from the

[1] The present article, though it was published in the September number of the *North American Review*, was written some months before the death of Mr. Howard, in August, 1908.

avenue, which I shall designate as the natural growth of the English drama. *The dramatists are ignoring their public. They are writing to please themselves.* They are promulgating work which the people do not want. The proof thereof is the colossal percentage of failures both in New York and London. *There are no logical reasons to account for the present poverty of the stage.* With an increasing population and a growing interest in the stage, the playwrights should be plentiful and their brains should be fertile.—I attribute the *present degeneration* of the English drama to the *alluring influence of the Continental playwrights who are providing their own stage lavishly with successful plays.*"

This opinion, expressed by an American dramatist of honorable achievement, represents a very extensive public opinion in America; and because it is representative I will take the liberty of trying to analyze Mr. Howard's utterance with a view to answering the question put above: Why is the drama, as a mode of expression, differentiated funda-

mentally in the public mind from other forms of literature?

"*The dramatists are ignoring their public. They are writing to please themselves.*"

This statement, which, for our purposes, I will take as applying simply to this side of the Atlantic, made by one who has been intimately familiar for many years with our native drama and its conditions, corroborates my statement that not until lately has the incentive to self-expression lodged itself in the American dramatist.

From the stated tendency, however, I would draw a different inference from Mr. Howard's — not the "degeneration" of the present drama, but its regeneration. And in support of this inference, I would cite a comparison — an American comparison — between the present period of our native drama and the New England period of our native literature in its beginnings. And in this connection I would suggest the following queries:—

If Nathaniel Hawthorne, in his own day, had *not* sufficiently ignored his contemporary

public to write to please himself, how much would the public of to-day, how much would the public of to-morrow, desire to read his works?

And again — what is, perhaps, even more to the point: If he had *not* written to please himself, would Hawthorne have written at all? Would his genius have expressed itself?

If Emerson, Whittier, Whitman, Lowell, in their noblest and most *successful* utterances, had not been moved to expression by an inner necessity, but, instead, had been moved by the outward necessity of ascertaining what their public wanted them to say, would the public of their day, of this day, and of to-morrow be the richer or the poorer?

And again: If by some miraculous dispensation those same poets, reborn with the instinct and knowledge of stagecraft, were to-day writing for our stage to please themselves, would their writings be therefore degenerative to our drama?

Such queries, and the deductions they sug-

gest, may ring strange in minds unaccustomed to correlate the drama with literature.

In any event, it may be objected, the times of those American poets were different times from these. In those days the American public was attentive, far more than to-day, to the voice of literature for leadership and counsel and inspiration, and therefore it behooved those literary leaders to remember their responsibility and maintain their highest personal standards of expression accordingly. To-day things are different; to-day "with an increasing population and a growing interest in the stage" the public is turning yearly more and more away from literature proper toward the theatre as the seat of a great and vital public influence. Times are changing. The vehicle of national expression is different.

To be sure, it is different; but *how* different? Doubtless the drama is *an other* vehicle than the lyric, the poem, or the novel; but is it, of its nature, *so* different from those forms of literature that it is functionally unfitted to become an instrument for leadership,

and counsel, and inspiration? And if it is not unfitted, what, then, of its leaders? Does it not behoove them all the more to remember their responsibility to their own time and to maintain their highest personal standards accordingly? In other words, does it not to-day behoove our dramatists, for the public's sake, "to please themselves"; "to ignore their public" to the extent of wisely serving it?

For in this phrase, "to ignore the public," what precisely do we mean by "the public"? The demands of the public, of course. Yes, but do we mean the reasonable demands of the public, or the foolish demands of the public? One or the other of these, of course, we *must* ignore; but can there be any hesitancy as to which? Or if the public, by the nature of its theatrical education, persists in making foolish demands, shall we therefore be sceptical of human nature, or of the nature of present theatrical education? No, our dramatists cannot believe too stanchly in the inherent human worth of the public; but it is precisely because they have so long ignored

in the public the grand and beautiful instincts which are potential in it, and, catered instead to the petty and ignoble instincts which are actual in it, that our dramatists have expressed so little of lasting service to the public. Yet if we are to uphold in American drama standards of American achievement in literature, this custom of ignoring potential fineness in the public must be rejected.

Times change is, indeed, a potent proverb, which is, however, modified perennially by another, *History repeats itself.* As the stimulus to self-expression, which at the beginning of our New England literary period bodied itself forth in the works of Hawthorne, Emerson, and "the Transcendentalists," had its origin in the influence of independent Continental thinkers, so in the present decade the initial impulse to self-expression in the awakening art of the drama is doubtless traceable (to quote Mr. Howard conversely) "to the alluring influence of the Continental playwrights," who are not only "providing their own stage

lavishly with successful plays," but are doing this *because* they are independent thinkers writing to please themselves.

The chief contrast of their Continental conditions to ours, of course, is this: That their Continental public has long since been educated, by the endowed nature of its theatres, to demand of its dramatists that they shall please themselves, — in other words, to demand of their dramatists *leadership* in taste and art and ideas; and their most potent and convincing *leaders* are followed most loyally by the public. In brief, the Continental public has gone dramatically to school for several centuries; it is artistically "grown up," reasonable, mature. Ours has been left to shift aimlessly for its schooling, — practically unprovided by our theatres with formative discipline in art, good taste, or ideas, — while it has spent its time crying for meaningless diversion, with which, for a consideration, it has been provided *ad nauseam*, to the result that, like a spoiled child, it has lost all idea of what it is crying for.

Yet this principle of humoring the spoiled child, frankly admitted as such, is the basic principle on which our dramatists are asked — nay, required, like it or lump it, if they are able — to upbuild a modern national drama commensurate with that of Europe. Obviously, in such an international contest, there is involved a handicap. In fine art or football, a fair start is part of the real game. How, then, before our game begins, to achieve the fair start?

Mr. Howard says we must not "ignore" the aimless cry of the public; otherwise our work will "degenerate." We must not adopt the Continental principle of pleasing ourselves as artists; otherwise our plays, *unlike* the Continental plays, will fail. But Mr. Howard probably *means* something different; namely, that *we must not imitate the technique nor appropriate the message of* Continental art; but that we must express ourselves in our own way. And with this I beg leave heartily to agree. But *if* he means this, he, and with him a large public opinion, has

strangely confused in utterance the real issue of our dramatic problem, which is, — the necessity for self-expression by our dramatists, as *leaders, not as followers,* of the public.

Leadership: Here is the heart of our discussion, and the answer to its question: Why is the drama fundamentally differentiated in the public mind from other forms of literature? Here is the answer.

Literature in all ages has been the voice of leadership. Whether in art, or scholarship, or religion, or æsthetics, or statecraft, self-expression, the voice of independent contemplation, the utterances of leadership, and alone of leadership, have raised themselves to the rank of literature. As such they have gained the reverence of time for large public service. The speech of Lincoln at Gettysburg, the "Elegy in a Country Churchyard," the comedy of "The Tempest," each is an utterance of self-expression without which none of them would be literature.

Literature, then, by charm, and exhorta-

tion, and delight, has uplifted, has *led* the public. The drama is filled with potential charm, exhortation, and delight; but in our country, which is our present concern, the drama has failed to enlist those, its puissant capacities, in the cause of leadership. By its own refusal, or by prohibitive circumstance, it has failed to lead the public. Rightly, therefore, public opinion has cast the drama forth from literature; naturally, the public mind has dissociated the theatre from all relationship to institutions for the public weal. Nevertheless, the public mind has not done this consciously, by thoughtful analysis of the drama and the theatre in their real nature. Instead, the public mind, from habit considering the theatre a concern merely of its leisure moments, has simply not considered the nature of the drama at all, except in its transmogrified aspect as a kind of varicolored cordial wherewith the public is recommended to aid its after-dinner digestion, or dyspepsia.

In this capacity it receives notorious attention in the daily newspapers, where it is

diligently exploited and advertised, being, according to its various brands and samples, vouched for or condemned by expert tasters and epicures.

We have referred, however, to the drama in its true nature and function. Doubtless to the interests of that a submerged minority of the public is already devoted. But likewise that minority tends to differentiate the functions of drama and literature. Why? Have we wholly accounted in our discussion for this fact? I believe not. The reason, I think, lies in a certain *real* distinction between the nature of drama and that of other literary forms. It is this — an obvious distinction, yet frequently ignored in critical estimates of plays:

The completed work of the dramatist is not the completed work of the theatrical producer. Unlike the finished manuscript of the writer of novels, lyrics, or essays, which has only to be mechanically copied and printed in order to serve its public purpose, the finished manuscript of the playwright must be bodied

forth and interpreted, physically and psychically, by a considerable number of living personalities,—actors, scene painters, stage managers, etc. Indeed, we must seek an allied art, not of words but of music, in order to cite an adequate analogy.

The composer of a symphony completes his task when he completes his score. The public purpose of his score, however, is consummated by the director of a symphony orchestra, by means of his musicians and their instruments. Thus the printed manuscript of Shakspere is *functionally* more closely related to the printed score of Beethoven than it is to the printed manuscript of Milton.

Yet the mere outward likeness of the printed texts of dramatists to those of other writers has been a perennial occasion for unsound literary comparisons. So far, however, has the standard of just musical appreciation already exceeded the standards of dramatic and literary criticism that the musical critic who should confuse the accomplishment of a First Violin with that of Beethoven would

probably attract public remark; whereas, in dramatic criticism, the unfathomable identification of Garrick, Sir Henry Irving, or Mr. Sothern with Shakspere continues to pleasurably confound the unconscious readers and play-goers of the generations.

It is in this regard that the growing custom of publishing the texts of modern plays is serving a useful purpose of public enlightenment. By this, of course, I do not refer to the more widespread custom of publishing, in connection with the production of a play, a novelization of its plot, usually designated as the "Book of the Play"; for this custom, by a confusion of ideas, only obscures more darkly than before the ends and means of dramaturgy. But the actual naked text of the play itself serves to inform the reader, who is also a play-goer, in the first principles, so to speak, of the anatomy of the dramatic idea, — to train him, as a reader, to forecast in his own mind the play's production, and as a play-goer, to criticise the play as the naked image which production is truthfully to clothe.

It is this unusual demand upon the imagination and understanding of the reader which makes the reading of plays, as yet, somewhat unpopular; but it is this same reaction of mind upon text which causes play-reading as a pleasure almost never to pall, but increasing the appetite by custom, to dissatisfy one thenceforward with all less imaginative kinds of reading. Consulting the play's text as the score, so to speak, of the dramatist's symphony, the reader becomes familiar at once with the creative idea and with the essential requisites of its interpretation.

The beneficial results of this more intimate understanding of the ends and means of dramaturgy are, with time, likely to be far-reaching. For with the resulting enlightenment of his public, the dramatist himself will be held inevitably to higher and higher standards of execution; for there in his text he may not hide a poverty of ideas behind the riches of theatrical production, nor sterility of imagination behind the stage carpenter, nor defective characterization behind the resourceful genius

of an actor; but instead any false slip in his human construction, any distortion in technique, any shamming of ideal, will become the more glaring to his vigilant critic, the reader of his text.

So, too, a skilled reader of plays becomes an informed play-goer; he will judge a theatrical performance as the interpretation of a dramatic idea; he will judge acting as a mode of objectifying the creative art of the dramatist. So, from having been merely a layman, he will — by clarification of his standards — become an artist, and his art will be criticism. And thus, by a strong spiral of mutual enlightenment, the actor, too, will mount to ever higher standards of his special art, — interpretation. No longer receiving applause for the substitution of personality for impersonation, and prevented by informed public opinion from assuming an irrelevant dictatorship for subordinating the dramatic idea to his own caprice, the actor in his proper function will fall newly in love with his vocation as the subtlest and noblest of sym-

phonic players — the artist of the human instrument.

In such a rational harmony of functions there should at last be basis for the existence of a vocation now practically non-existent, save as it is temporarily assumed, with deficient powers or training, by dramatist, actor, stage-manager, theatrical producer, or by these in succession, or by all at once, to the consequent confusion of the dramatic idea: I mean the vocation of Theatrical Director, into whose hands — as into the hands of the orchestra director, the composer submits his score — the dramatist should be able to submit his text, with secure confidence of its being properly rendered to the public. Over all the multitudinous factors and instruments of theatrical performance this director, trained thereto as his special life-work, should be absolute master, and his function and responsibility should be to effect by those instruments the harmonious interpretation of the dramatic idea — the play.

So much for a glimpse toward rational con-

ditions which do not exist. The contrasted existing conditions of maladjustment between the play and its theatrical production constitute a second powerful reason why the drama is divorced from literature in the minds of intelligent persons. For these persons, from constantly viewing the production of plays by a theatre unqualified to produce plays without distortion, become accustomed to view the distorted result as the dramatic idea, mistake the production for the play itself, the actors for the dramatis personæ. The manner of acting or producing a play becomes for them no longer a means but an end in itself. Thus they come to misconceive the end and object of dramaturgy, conceiving that object to be interpretation instead of expression. Because a play, unlike a novel or essay, must, by its nature, be interpreted in order to fulfil its function, they conceive its function to be interpretation. But interpretation of what? Why, of the actors, scenery, etc. And so a great number of our plays themselves have actually come to

coincide with this distorted conception. Thus the art of the drama is turned wrong side out, the functions of play and actor are reversed, and the play itself becomes a mere vehicle for interpreting to its audience the personality of an actor, or the ingenuity of a stage-manager.

Obviously, intelligent persons will not view such an interpretative vehicle as a form of literature, since literature primarily is expression. How, then, shall these persons be persuaded that such vehicles are not true plays? How shall they be enlightened as to the true function of dramatic art?

As a means to this end, I have referred to the publication of the texts of plays; but I would not, of course, be construed as meaning that printing and reading plays can alone produce the desired effect. Many other factors of knowledge and emancipation must contribute to that. I mean only that the custom of publishing plays will become at least a real drop in the great empty bucket of public enlightenment concerning these things. For the printed play will gradually accustom

the American public to realize, as the public in France and Germany has long since realized, that the dramatic form is a legitimate form of self-expression, so that the universal publishing of plays will become as normal a custom as the universal publishing of novels. At the same time the public will become expert in the special art of reading plays, and thereby it will learn to judge them by standards not of the so-called "closet drama," whose hybrid standards are corruptive of sound dramaturgy, but by those of the theatre.

But — I hope it will be retorted — by standards of *what* theatre? By standards of the theatre, discordant, uncorrelated, misdirected, as we know it to exist, or by standards of the theatre as we have glimpsed it above, — harmonious, symphonic, directed by a rational unity?

The answer to this question is all-important to the subject we are discussing.

To one who seeks authentically to express himself in the forms of drama, it becomes sooner or later a temptation to ask himself:

Shall I express the dramatic ideas which are demanding utterance within me, because I consider them beautiful, or critical of life, or otherwise worthy of communication, and adapted to stage craft, albeit they are better adapted for interpretation by unrealized rational conditions of the theatre than by irrational existing ones? Or shall I, rather, choose to express only those dramatic ideas within me, or seek elsewhere at second hand for those without, which are readily adaptable to existing conditions and the open market? In the words of our analogy, shall I try to write a symphony, because I like to, albeit if produced there is only a leaderless, disorganized orchestra to perform it? Or shall I write a popular march, albeit I do not like to, because it is likely to be performed by the said orchestra?

However the dramatist may answer these questions for himself, it is certain that only one answer can result in literature and in real contribution to art. For the work which is not the utterance of an inward creative

joy is not a work of leadership, nor of large public service. *No; it is far better that our playwrights should remain sterile than that they should supply a meaningless demand of the public.* There is far less need of so-called "practical" plays, that may be easily produced by a theatre misqualified in the art of production, than there is need of a really practical theatre which shall stimulate and fulfil the demands put upon it by plays comprehending the entire dramatic scope of self-expression.

For such a theatre there is precedent — the much cited *Théâtre Français*, for example; yet what need is there of precedent when the issue is plain?

Either there can be no adequate self-expression in our drama, or there must be a theatrical institution adapted to interpret and stimulate such expression.

In America, the unprecedented promise of our people, the nature of our human resources comprising the world's inheritance, give sound conviction for believing in the

practical establishment of such an institution — unprecedented in efficacy of high public service. To this end it is incumbent upon all citizens and artists to whom the theatre is a living influence to consider the above issue and help to solve it rationally.

But as the seat of the initial creative power of the theatre, it is perhaps most incumbent upon the mind of the dramatist to emancipate its powers. That it will do so there is no reasonable doubt. The continuity of American literature will not cease at the theatre's doors. A new century, beautiful and terrible in portent, latent with unexampled passion and delight, waits to be expressed. Already the tide of ordained expression sets toward the art of the drama: the result is inexorable. An institution which is unwilling, or unable, to become the responsive instrument of such an art will cease to be, and another shall rise in its place, and subserve the Will-to-express.

ART AND DEMOCRACY

ART AND DEMOCRACY [1]

DEMOCRACY and art are matters of such vitality and magnitude that you will not, I take it, expect me to attempt any exhaustive definition or comparison of their vast influences. I will only describe to you a certain concrete memory which may perhaps serve to suggest, for this occasion, a personal impression and conviction.

I remember standing, a year or two ago, in the studio of Saint-Gaudens, watching some of his assistants at work. A seated figure of colossal size was being pointed up in plastilene from a small completed statue. The process, of course, was simply a mechanical one, yet it seemed strangely to repeat in tangible form the nebulous creation of that work in the mind of the sculptor. Still half grotesquely obscured in a mass of clay-like

[1] Delivered before the Society for Ethical Culture, New York, on Lincoln's Birthday, 1908.

substance, slowly, very slowly, but with preternatural sureness, the shape and features of a human form were visibly evolving into the sunlight, projecting upon the floor at my feet a still undecipherable shadow, — the image of the image of a dream. What that seated figure was, might as yet only be guessed. Power was there, and pensiveness, and in the half-bowed head, already discernible, the large lineaments of pathos. Identity, however, was still lacking.

A few days afterward, I went to the studio again. This time there was no doubt what presence I was in. It was not the colossal proportions of the seated image that filled the place with awe. It was the mighty sense that there sat Lincoln, thinking. Very simply he sat there, — a lank figure in modern coat and trousers, uncompromisingly homely, yet beautiful by personality. One hand rested on the arm of his chair, the other on his knee; his head was slightly bowed; he was thinking.

It was perhaps easy to persuade oneself

that there was simply a statue — an image in plastilene. "A work of art" we name it, and so it is appraised by connoisseurs for the craft of its execution. But to look upon that image, and to feel the combined compulsion of the subject and its rendering, is to experience more than a sense of æsthetic achievement: it is to experience a sense of history.

That statue, now cast in bronze, will be exhibited for the first time next month here in New York, at the Metropolitan Museum. Of the many who will then look upon it, a few, who are themselves artists in some field, will doubtless admire the masterly adroitness with which the sculptor has treated his subject technically; the unflinching candor with which he has handled the commonplaces of his modern material, yet selected those plastic elements only which have served to express the life and total reality of his subject. Here is no dead wood of workmanship; all is vital. These artists may perhaps feel also the compelling personality of our great President as interpreted by our great sculptor, yet

each will probably be inspired with a longing to become in his own sphere — not a Lincoln, but a Saint-Gaudens.

A far greater number there will be who will feel little of the means by which the sculptor has accomplished his end. They will feel simply the end. They will feel an impression, more or less vague and inexpressible, of the greater reality of that seated image as compared with themselves who gaze upon it. Whether they are conscious of it or not, the mutable clay in themselves will lay its homage upon the knees of the immutable bronze and cry out with ephemeral prayer. And they shall not go unanswered. For they shall bear away with them a sense that they, too, are a part of that higher pageantry which passes before the thinking eyes of the image; that they, too, as well as the generation of the Civil War and the American generations to come, are the objects of that deep and solicitous thought.

And even if that image should be melted before their eyes, they who had looked upon

it could never look upon history as before. For they would have *experienced*, not merely deduced, the causes of Lincoln's immortality. Thus each of those many will have vaguely aspired to be a Lincoln, but hardly a Saint-Gaudens.

A remaining few there may be who, looking upon the statue, shall be equally moved by the genius of the sculptor and of the statesman. They will realize that here undoubtedly is a great work of art; and here also undoubtedly is a great work of democracy. They will detect the kinship that exists between the mind which controls the plastic motives of art and that which controls the plastic motives of men, and in both cases they will appraise the value of that control by a single criterion: its effectiveness for human happiness.

Thus they will recognize how, in no uncertain sense, Lincoln was, as statesman, a Saint-Gaudens; Saint-Gaudens, as artist, a Lincoln. The equal caliber of their greatness may, of course, be disputed, but not

the nature of that greatness. Each was a master, because each was a master-servant of humanity. The great common basis of their fame is public service.

I am aware that to a large majority of persons the work and careers of these two men will appear as sundered as the antipodes; nevertheless, the basis of my comparison I believe is sound.

On the one hand, there exists to-day a world of pure art, so called, which concerns itself little, or not at all, with the interests of politics, sociology, statesmanship. On the other hand, is a world of democracy, which concerns itself little, or not at all, with the interests of æsthetics, artistry, craftsmanship. The world of art complains that democracy ignores the concerns of beauty. Democracy complains that the world of art ignores the concerns of citizenship. Both frequently deduce, therefore, that they have nothing in common.

Now the complaint of both is valid, but not their deduction. *For true democracy is vitally concerned with beauty, and true art is vitally*

concerned with citizenship. When each is true to itself, there is no disruption of interests. *Phidias and Pericles had no quarrel.* Reconciliation of their aims depends only upon the recognition by each of its proper function. The issue, "art for art's sake," is as meaningless as "statesmanship for the sake of statesmanship." For if the former have any meaning, it can only mean, art for the sake of excellence. But art itself is expression. "Art for art's sake" must, therefore, mean, art for the sake of expressing that which is most excellent. But what is that which is most excellent to express? That surely which conduces to the greatest human happiness.

Has statesmanship properly any other aim than this?

In every nation, then, art and statesmanship are vital concerns of the people, for whose greatest happiness they properly exist. The important thing is for the people to realize this truth, and to impress upon both that, *in neither one case nor the other can there be too high an excellence for the public good.*

Our own nation is no exception to the validity of this truth. In America, the kinship of the true artist and the true statesman is clear and legitimate: both are children of the Commonweal. And the noblest function of democracy is to bear sons who shall excellently express — for their countless brothers that are dumb and incapable — the excellent beauty of their common mother.

SOME COMMENTS, BY WAY OF EPILOGUE

SOME COMMENTS, BY WAY OF EPILOGUE

THE author has preferred to let the text of the foregoing addresses remain practically as written for their original purposes, and to add, instead of to incorporate, the following comments, which have seemed to him pertinent:—

Comment for Page 106

The analysis of Vaudeville here given has been somewhat misinterpreted by a portion of the press. When this address, "The Drama of Democracy," was delivered by me at Columbia University, the paragraphs concerning Vaudeville were singled out for report in the daily newspapers, and were afterwards quoted by some of the weekly journals. The emphasis of these reports seemed to convey the impression that I had singled out the Vaudeville profession as an

object of "attack" — an idea which is far removed from my intention or approval. As I have had frequent occasion to repeat, reform in the theatre to-day is properly concerned with renovating certain large conditions in the community; it is *not* properly concerned with picking faults in individuals or vocations which exist because of those conditions.

The reference to Vaudeville in my essay is for the purpose of illustrating specifically the operation of a general tendency of theatrical business — the tendency which I have called the law of increasing emotional and decreasing intellectual demand.

The effects of that tendency are observable almost as much in the "legitimate" business as in Vaudeville, though perhaps not as concretely and clearly, and those effects are open to interpretation as facts by all interested persons, in and out of the theatrical profession, without thereby casting aspersion on the many talented, idealistic, and hard-working members of that profession.

For Page 108

"Financial risk" is the elemental evil at the root of all theatrical problems discussed in this book. It is involved, of course, in all theatrical business, "legitimate" as well as Vaudeville. It is an universal proposition of existing conditions, yet its direct corollaries, as they are involved in the art, the culture, and the ethics of our communities, are almost universally ignored.

Everywhere it is known and admitted that, under these present conditions, the drama is "a gamble," and almost everywhere this is admitted with complacence or indifference. Yet when the spirit which delights in "a gamble" raises its obnoxious head in our legislatures, our insurance companies, our public school boards, and even our race-tracks, public revolt instantly asserts itself, and the extirpation of the "gamble" becomes frequently the object of a civic campaign.

It would seem superfluous to add that until the object of theatrical productions ceases

to be "a gamble," the drama cannot become, what its capacities fit it to be, a vital and constructive force of civilization.

For Page 118

"A new and nobler art of impersonation" is, of course, desirable and necessary for the development of our native drama. Here I have done no more than refer to it, as the subject involves an essay in itself.

As plays may be made or marred by their interpretation, it follows that all rational steps in developing a new dramaturgy must be accompanied by rational steps in developing a school of actors trained to the needs of the dramatist.

At present, actors (when they receive any schooling at all) are, of necessity, trained to the needs not primarily of the dramatist, but of the theatrical business, chiefly classifiable under the needs of the manager for a particular personality and salary, or of the "star" for a particular stature, voice, etc.

These needs are practical considerations

at all times, and have bearing upon the actor's vocation under any conditions; but these needs now are necessarily circumscribed by the limited scope in art of the plays which the theatrical business can *risk* producing, and by the consequent low standards of criticism in acting, which are inculcated thereby in the public.

For a wider scope in art, and for a greater comprehensiveness in training, actors are, as a class, keenly desirous themselves.

For Pages 52, 53, 54

By "the Law of Dramatic Deterioration" I do not, of course, intend anything analogous to an absolute law, such as a law of nature. By "law," in that phrase, I mean no more than *an observable tendency*, based in the psychological laws of human nature.

But it may be questioned: In looking back over the history of our theatre, especially over its history during the last five or ten years, is such a tendency observable? On the contrary, is not our theatre better, in plays,

acting, and efficient organization than ever before?

This is a valid question to put, and because we must certainly answer it in the affirmative, the conclusion may seem to follow that no such tendency as the Law of Dramatic Deterioration exists.

A little further analysis, however, leads, I think, to the opposite conclusion.

The requirements of theatrical business being what they are, it will hardly be denied that the law of increasing emotional and decreasing intellectual demand is a law which presumably, in the long run, will best fulfil those requirements.

Why, then, is our theatrical situation undeniably better than ten years ago, — than five years ago? — undeniably full of fine promise, accomplishment increasingly fine? — undeniably *not* deteriorated?

In a word, I reply, because the theatrical situation is becoming part of a national situation. In spite of itself, the theatre is feeling the compulsive stress of an awakened conscious-

ness in the democracy. In that national awakening which also is world-wide, lies the exhilarating promise of the theatre to-day. In that awakening, I may add, lies the relevancy of the sharper criticism which to-day is being brought to bear upon the theatre, better though it be — a criticism which, while it acknowledges that betterment, analyzes it, and understands the real causes of its being.

In brief, the Law of Dramatic Deterioration is at work now in the theatre with greater potency than ever before; but likewise it is being combated, and in part checked, by other forces, greater than have ever opposed it before — forces arising not from within the theatre, but from outside it; the forces of national regeneration, the forces of renascent democracy.

Therefore, if our theatrical situation is better than ever before, it is not due to the tendency which underlies theatrical business, but to the tendencies which underlie intelligent democracy.

In those renascent forces of democracy we do well to put hope and faith. Yet the very

idea of renascence implies a possible waning of forces. And therefore it is wise that, during their eras of finer ideals involving the common interest, men should take action of foresight, and embody those ideals in strong institutions, permanently safeguarded against the forces alike of ignorance and of individualism.

To that end men have endowed universities; to that end they will yet endow theatres.

For Page 52

To the majority of our play-goers, even to-day, the words *drama* and *acting* are practically synonymous. To them *dramaturgy* is a term of vague or no import; for them, the actors *are* "the show." This confusion in the public mind between the arts of actor and dramatist — of interpretation and creation — has been nurtured by theatrical tradition from the earliest advent of the strolling player in America to the present acme of the star system.

On September 5, 1905, *The New York Commercial* published a compilation of American theatrical anecdote and history, entitled: "The

First Dramatic Annual." It consisted of articles, signed by well-known members of the profession, reminiscent of the American stage for many years past. The writers recalled a host of actors and actresses, more or less distinguished, all dear to the people: Edwin Booth, Lester Wallack, John McCulloch, Maurice Barrymore, Mrs. John Drew, Lawrence Barrett, and so on. Throughout the entire compilation, however, there is hardly an allusion to an American dramatist. Obviously, in those reminiscences, the players, not the plays, represent the vital past of the American theatre. Some of the old plays, to be sure, are recalled in memories of "The Banker's Daughter," "The Still Alarm," "The Henrietta," "Hazel Kirke," "The Two Orphans," and others, but always as vehicles for some favorite "star."

Again, in a critical digest[1] of our New York stage, written by Mr. Norman Hapgood as late as 1901, and treating of the years 1897–

[1] "The Stage in America," The Macmillan Co., New York.

1900, the chapter headings are significant. Out of seventeen chapters, eight headings, dealing with New York productions, read as follows:—

1. Recent Shakspere: Tragedy.
2. Ibsen.
3. Foreign Tragedy.
4. Goethe, Schiller, Lessing.
5. Rostand.
6. Pinero, Shaw, Jones.
7. Other British Importations.
8. From the French.

Of the remaining nine headings, only *one* — treating of the late James Herne and Mr. William Gillette — deals with work by American dramatists. Throughout the volume, however, are discussed the histrionic technique and personal gifts of many accomplished actors and actresses, such as: Margaret Anglin, Julia Arthur, John Drew, Mrs. Fiske, Nat Goodwin, Julia Marlowe, Richard Mansfield, Henry Miller, Ada Rehan, Eleanor Robson, E. H. Sothern, Otis Skinner.

Since the date of Mr. Hapgood's book, only one critical digest of our stage during the in-

terval since 1900 has appeared as a volume. In Mr. Walter P. Eaton's stimulating book,[1] published in the autumn of 1908, an important increase of emphasis upon dramaturgy is evidenced. Nevertheless, it still remains true that no American dramatist has yet attained such rank in the art of play-writing as Edwin Booth attained in the art of acting. The obvious reason for this fact also remains in force: the American dramatist has existed chiefly for the sake of the actor; the creative art has been subservient to the interpretative.

For Pages 82 and 86

The conditions of Endowment are *not* the conditions of Subsidy by Subscription.

This truth would seem to be obvious, yet there is much popular misconception on the subject. Some theatrical enterprises supported by subscription have been frequently alluded to in the press as "endowed" theatres. Likew[redacted]the principle of subscription is often

[1] "The American Stage of To-day:" Small, Maynard & Co., Boston.

vaguely referred to as being the same as that of endowment, or practically equivalent to it.

As a matter of fact, the principle of endowment has never been tried in America, nor, so far as the writer knows, has it ever been uncompromisingly adopted in the case of any theatre proposed or already projected in this country.

Between subscription and endowment there is an impassable chasm of principle. The former is a makeshift, the latter a solution. Subsidy of art by subscription does not recognize the right of art to perpetual freedom from commercial competition; endowment does recognize that right. Subscription releases art from subjection on a temporary parole; endowment signs its emancipation proclamation.

Being compelled, for its own survival, to appeal to existing public standards of taste within a given few weeks, or months, or seasons, a theatre supported only by [redacted]scription is thereby prevented from *leading* public taste; yet to enable it to lead public taste is

presumably the very object of the subscription; therefore, the enterprise is infected from the start with an innate compromise which tends to undermine the ideal at stake.

Thus, at best, the principle of subscription may only check or defer the operation of the Law of Dramatic Deterioration; whereas the principle of endowment may annul it.

At worst, the principle of subscription may — by its failure to check that law at the outset, and by the consequent failure of its special enterprise — shake public faith in the cause of endowment with which it is so frequently confused in principle.

In any event, by seeking to subsidize a business instead of an art, subscription serves to obscure the real issue of dramatic emancipation — the issue whether the theatre's function in the community shall be that of art or business.

For an effectual business needs no subsidy; but an effectual art cannot live without it.

Men of wealth, who endow museums, libraries, universities, do so, presumably, be-

cause they believe in the special causes of those institutions, and wish to serve them. Yet men of wealth, who believe in the cause of the theatre and wish to serve it, have so far hesitated to endow the theatre, as museums, libraries, and universities are endowed. Instead, when they have contributed money in its cause, they have subsidized it as a business, in the vague apprehension that thus they were subsidizing it as an art. And always they have proposed to get at least a percentage of their money back.

It would sound strange to one of our university presidents to receive the offer of a great sum for endowment by a philanthropist, upon the stipulation that the university should show good security for returning to the philanthropist a certain per cent on the amount of his endowment. Founded upon such a financial basis, a medical school, a museum, an institute of scientific research, would have a hard scramble for existence, its special cause could hardly be expected to thrive in the community, its staff and equipment could hardly be ex-

pected to fulfil effectually the objects for which it was founded.

The outright endowment of theatres — the idea of which, in this country, is usually considered as an impracticable dream — is to-day a proved actuality in several of the countries of Europe. In Germany especially, theatrical endowment, so far from being chimerical, is a commonplace; and, in consequence, there is probably no other modern nation in which the theatre, as an institution, is so effectual an instrument of social and civic ideas.

In the light of these facts and comparisons, are not the following propositions reasonable?

The permanent emancipation of dramatic art from theatrical business is a special cause.

The success of that special cause would permanently benefit the nation.

A cause whose success would permanently benefit the nation is a cause which deserves the support of all citizens able to promote the efficient means to its success.

The efficient ıean· › the success of the drama's special cause is endowment.

Therefore,

The drama's special cause should be endowed by citizens able to endow it.

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